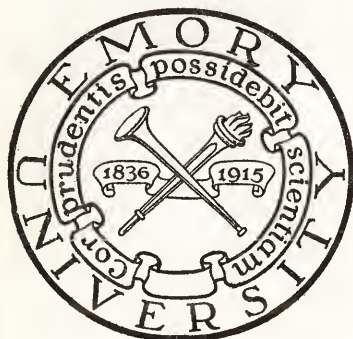


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Fair Women



BY

Mrs. Forrester

AUTHOR OF

"Diana Carew"

"Viva"

"My Lord and My Lady"
Etc.



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FAIR WOMEN.

By MRS. FORRESTER.

That her fair form may stand and shine
Make bright our days and light our dreams,
Turning to scorn with lips divine
The falsehood of extremes.

TENNYSON.



NEW YORK:
GEORGE MUNRO'S SONS, PUBLISHERS,
17 to 27 VANDEWATER STREET.

FAIR WOMEN.

PART FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

A SCION OF THE OLD FRENCH NOBLESSE.

MARIE ANTOINETTE DE MONTOLIEU sat before an old-fashioned embroidery-frame in her tiny drawing-room. She was a true scion of the old French noblesse, with her fine features and clear, pale complexion. There had been vivacity and brightness, too, in those brown eyes, but the luster was gone now, and there was left only the calm expression of resignation which follows a life of troubles nobly borne.

There was nothing to indicate present suffering in the placid, gentle, kindly face. Nay, there was a smile of peaceful content on the pale lips; it was the look that told how much *had been* suffered; how much overcome.

She wore a black silk dress, with a white pelerine folded across the breast; her gray hair was brushed back from her face, and surmounted by a fine white lace Pompadour cap. This had been her unvarying costume for the last twenty years.

Mlle., or Mme. de Montolieu, as she was always called, had lived sixty-four years in the world. Hers had been a dreary life, with the monotony only broken by occasional bitter sorrows. Such a joyless life, that her sweet placid temper was a marvel to those who knew how sad and friendless her career had been.

Her father and mother, the Marquis and Marquise de Montolieu, had been in high favor at the court of Louis the Sixteenth. They were proud, handsome aristocrats, and when the Revolution came with its fearful horrors, they

were compelled to fly for their lives. The marquis loved his wife dearly, but he determined to risk all for the sake of his king and country, and remained in the outskirts of Paris, sheltered by a faithful old servant (who pretended to be in league with the democrats), while his young wife fled to England with her two children. After great perils by land and sea, she arrived in a small fishing-smack at Dover; but the hardships they had undergone proved too much for the little children, who died within a week of their landing. The heart-broken mother would have perished of want but for the care and assistance of some kind Samaritans, who kept her until after the fatal sixteenth of October, when her husband, abandoning all hope, escaped from France and joined her. They were penniless, and compelled to earn their bread. The marquis gave lessons in singing, and the marquise made a little money by selling her paintings.

A kind-hearted nobleman, who had known them in former days, allowed them fifty pounds a year; and with this, and the fruit of their own exertions, they managed to exist. It *was* only existence to them, the lavish courtiers of an extravagant and luxurious court. Three years later a daughter was born to them, whom they named Marie Antoinette, in affectionate and reverential memory of their martyred queen. From her earliest infancy she was deeply imbued with the sad spirit of the time: and the unvarying melancholy of her parents produced a strong effect upon her. She was naturally bright and vivacious, but the atmosphere of a constant sadness was infectious.

She would sit convulsed with tears, her eyes buried in her mother's lap, listening to the heart-rending stories her parents repeated to each other of the terrible Revolution. She had heard the marquis tell how the noble queen had stood out with her two children on the balcony, in the sight of an infuriated populace; and when the mob shrieked out, "No children, the queen alone!" how she had put her son and daughter into the arms of the king, and returned to the balcony. She had wept over the stories of cruelty and indignity to which her martyred namesake had been exposed, and she had sobbed herself to sleep when her father related how the poor queen, seated in the tumbrel, her face distorted by grief, and one eye almost obliterated by the damp, unwholesome prison in which she had been confined,

had, on her way to death, moved even the furious multitude to shame and awe.

The gentle Princess de Lamballe, and the Duchess de Maille, who had twice so marvelously escaped the guillotine, had been her mother's intimate friends. She had sickened with horror as her mother had described the loathsome Marat, from whom children and animals shrunk with fear and terror. There was a beautiful young duchess, the bosom friend of the Marquise de Montolieu, on whose face Marat spat as she went to execution. The duchess, with all the *sang-froid* of the French noblesse, quietly wiped her face with her handkerchief, and then flung it under the wheels of the *charette*. There were terrible stories of the colossal Danton, the perfidious, cowardly Robespierre, the deformed and cruel Couthon, the impious Desmoulins, the violent Tallien, and all the bloodthirsty tyrants of the Revolution; and there were sad memories of the brilliant and loyal aristocrats, and of the venerable Malesherbes and the brave Deseze. All these stories affected Marie powerfully, and saddened her young life with their painful influence.

When she was seventeen years old her beloved father died, and from that time all her energies were strained to provide for her heart-broken and widowed mother. Five years later the marquise died also, and Marie was thrown on the world, literally friendless and penniless. Then all at once the nobleman who had befriended her parents came forward and offered her a home in his house, in spite of the remonstrances of his wife, who was keenly alive to the imprudence of bringing a beautiful young girl under the same roof with her grown-up sons.

For a time Marie Antoinette was happy, and then came the most bitter trial of her life. She went out again as a governess, and traveled abroad. At the age of thirty-five she went into Sir Howard Champion's family, to educate his daughters, and remained with them twelve years. The elder daughter made a brilliant match, and the younger eloped with a gentleman farmer. There being thus no further occasion for her services, she was dismissed; but Sir Howard, being a liberal although arrogant and despotic man, settled an annuity of a hundred pounds on her for life. On this, and the interest of what she had saved during her long years of teaching, she lived; and small as was

her income, she gave away much. Hers was a grand life of love, of charity, and of self-abnegation. Unsoured by her troubles, unimbittered by her loneliness, she was the true picture of a gentle, sympathizing, and patient woman.

CHAPTER II.

ONLY A FARMER'S DAUGHTER.

THE hot afternoon sun was glaring fiercely on the pavement of a long, straggling street in an old-fashioned, unimportant country town. It was much too hot for the comfort of any human being, and although it was market-day, no one seemed much inclined for business. The group of farmers, generally so talkative, stood clustered together under the shelter of the old tumble-down town-hall, and mopped their faces, and complained of the heat, and looked generally cross and unconvivial; while their dogs lay crouched in corners, with lolling tongue and panting sides. The only thing that seemed to take any pleasure in the scorching rays was the great brass cock over the market-place, which shone with dazzling radiance as it moved to and fro in the influence of every passing breath of wind. It was a quaint street, and there were some curious-looking old tenements in it. For the most part they were composed of lath and plaster, with ponderous cross-beams, which seemed to keep the old latticed windows from tumbling out into the street; but here and there, more especially in the vicinity of the town-hall, there were brick shops of some pretension, with plate-glass windows, and an array of wares which seemed to denote that the dressing of the shop was an object of some solicitude. There was even a handsome hotel, for the town of which I am writing was not very many miles distant from a favorite race-course, and during the race week it was frequented by parties of great distinction and fashion.

The town clock had just struck four, when a splendidly appointed carriage, drawn by a pair of high-stepping bays, rolled up to the door of the principal linen-draper. The powdered footman flung himself from the box, and having previously received his instructions, marched grandly into the shop, brushing somewhat rudely past a tall, graceful

girl who was just leaving. She lingered for a moment, while her eyes rested on the occupants of the barouche. Leaning back on the cushions was a haughty-looking woman of middle age; by her side sat a magnificent, disdainful young blonde, attired in the freshest and most elegant of country toilets; and opposite, in deep conversation with her, leaned a man who seemed to Winifred Eyre the handsomest she had ever seen. As the carriage stopped, he looked round and saw her, and then he leaned forward eagerly, and she heard him exclaim:

“What lovely eyes! Miss Champion, who is that?”

The answer came in a clear, well-bred, contemptuous voice:

“A daughter of one of the neighboring farmers, I believe.”

Winifred had heard enough; she turned away with burning cheeks, and walked hastily down the street. Poor child! she was so bitterly vexed in her heart, that only her strong pride kept back the hot tears that welled into her eyes—those lovely eyes that had just called forth such a burst of admiration. She walked on quickly, never heeding the intense heat—along the hot, glowing pavement, across a narrow pathway leading through a field, and out into the country road, never slackening her pace until she arrived at her destination.

I must leave her for a while and go back a great many years, in order to put the gentle reader in possession of certain facts which will explain the position of the people whose story I propose to relate.

Sir Howard Champion was one of the proudest men in England. He was rich, of old family, and owned three fine estates. The smallest lay in Hirstshire, but he preferred it to the others, because it was the prettiest and the nearest to London. He was a very arrogant man, haughty to those above him in rank, dictatorial to his equals, and courteously disdainful to his inferiors—a man before whom his children and servants quailed, and whom his wife obeyed implicitly in fear and trembling. She was a poor, timid creature, as such men's wives by a fortunate dispensation of Providence always are; and she died young, leaving three children, a boy and two girls.

Sir Howard did not marry again; he did not care much for women; he had wanted a son to perpetuate the race,

and inherit the broad acres of the Champions; and he had one, and was content. When his daughters grew up, his whole ambition was centred in their making brilliant matches. They were haughty, handsome girls, both resembling their father; and if he did not love them, he was at least very proud of them. And not without reason. When Frances and Winifred Champion were introduced, they were greatly admired, and received several eligible offers. Frances, the elder, accepted the proposals of the rich Marquis of Volauton, a man of sixty, with her father's full consent and approbation. At the same time Winifred received an offer from an inane wealthy young viscount; but she was more sentimental or less heartless than her sister, and, in spite of her father's anger, was resolute in her refusal.

Howard, the son, was already married to a woman of great wealth and good family. When Winifred Champion returned to Hurst Manor, after her sister's marriage, she found it insufferably dull. She was fond of Mme. de Montolieu, who had been her governess, and now remained as her companion; but she did not find her conversation all-sufficient, and took very much to riding and driving, and other out-door amusements.

One day she was walking her horse along a lane, when the animal swerved. Her handkerchief was in her hand, and the sudden movement caused her to drop it. She turned to look for it, as well as to see what had frightened the horse, when a very handsome young man, gun in hand, jumped over a gate, picked it up, and presented it to her. His handsome face made her thanks very courteous, and there was an expression of undisguised admiration in his eyes that was anything but displeasing to her.

After that meeting she often rode in the same direction, and the handsome young sportsman, by a curious coincidence, was always there. A time came when she no longer cared for riding, but would take long solitary walks, declining Mme. de Montolieu's companionship, greatly to the gentle lady's regret. She began to fear that her pupil, whom she loved very dearly, no longer cared for her; but when she returned from her rambles, Winifred was so affectionate and caressing, that her governess dismissed all doubts as unjust.

A month passed, and the haughty Winifred Champion

was unreasonably and passionately in love with George Eyre. He had implored her to let him speak to her father, but she would not hear of it. She knew well what chance he had of becoming her husband with her father's consent. True, he was a gentleman farmer, and came of a respectable family, but one of Sir Howard's grooms would have stood as much chance of being accepted by him for a son-in-law as George Eyre.

And then he persuaded her to run away with him, and she forgot her birth, her pride, her position, all but her love, and consented.

When Sir Howard became aware of it, his anger was something terrible. He did not act as some men would have done under the circumstances; he did not stamp, or swear, or rave about the house, to the terror of the female servants, but he shut himself in his room for the space of five hours. When he came out his face was stern and set, and bore traces of a fearful struggle. He cursed his daughter solemnly on the Bible—from which he erased her name, and commanded that it might never be uttered in his presence again. The whole household were awe-stricken, and crept about silently and fearfully. Mme. de Montolieu was heart-broken.

Sir Howard was a just, if a harsh man; he did not blame her; he knew her too well either to doubt her care, or to suspect her of conniving at his daughter's elopement. When she left him, he expressed a courteous recognition of her services, and insisted on her accepting an annuity of a hundred pounds, in consideration of her having lived several years in his family.

Winifred bitterly regretted her false step. She loved the world and the fashion, and so the comparatively humble life she now led was gall and wormwood to her. Her husband was fond of her, but he chafed under her constant fretful regrets; she quarreled with his family, refused to notice them, and made him bitter, contemptuous little speeches, which drove him in anger from her presence. The only link left to her between the present and the past was Mme. de Montolieu, who came to live in a small cottage near her, and was with her constantly. But poor Winifred fretted night and day at her loss of caste, and became thin and ill; and when her little girl was born, she died; and I doubt if any one regretted her save her faithful governess.

For some years little Winifred was brought up and taken care of by her father's sister; but when she was eight years old Miss Eyre married, and her father was somewhat perplexed what to do with her. Mme. de Montolieu offered to educate her, and Mr. Eyre gladly accepted the offer.

CHAPTER III.

THE ALIEN OF A PROUD FAMILY.

WHEN my story commences, Winifred Eyre was nearly seventeen.

Ah! my winning, imperious, gracious Winifred, how shall I describe you fairly, who are so dear to me?

A face by no means perfect, according to the rules of beauty, but with so varying and changeful an expression that you never wearied of it, as one does sometimes of beautiful statuesque features. There were the lovely eyes, which varied with every transient feeling. Tender, beseeching, imperious, shy; sparkling with mirth, or indolently sleepy; eyes that no one, and, above all, no man, could see once without longing to look at again. A low, broad Grecian forehead, with the rich brown waving hair falling low over it, and then gathered back over the delicate ears; a nose perhaps too long; a mouth rather large, but with a proud, well-curved upper lip, and a clear, brunette complexion; a tall, lithe figure; small hands and feet—and my description is ended. But the most difficult task—the endeavor to portray her character—is yet before me. Must I confess it? My Winifred was full of faults; but then they were faults which made one love her the more. If she was proud, she was warm-hearted; if at times people called her disdainful and imperious, they were forced to admit she was generous and impulsive; if she loved and desired admiration, it was impossible to accuse her of vanity or conceit. But the man or woman who could be with stately, gracious Winifred Eyre, and knowing her well could yet not love her, must indeed have been hard to please.

She had received a complete education from Mme. de Montolieu, who loved her as a daughter, and had brought her up with tender care and watchfulness. She spoke French perfectly, was a good musician and sung as sweetly

as a nightingale. Mme. de Montolieu had devoted great time and care to perfecting her accomplishments, hoping that, when she grew up, Sir Howard might relent, and give her an opportunity of entering into society, for which she was eminently fitted. But the baronet and his whole family sternly persisted in ignoring her, and it was a very bitter grief and humiliation to poor Winifred.

It seemed so cruelly unjust. Why should Flora Champion, her cousin, be courted, and flattered, and received everywhere, while she, who longed so ardently for the same advantages, who was compelled to live unnoticed in a farmhouse, without a single companion of her own age, and no further amusement than her books, her piano, and her drives? Her father had given her a pretty little pony and carriage, in which she took great pleasure. She would have liked to ride as well, but her father could not afford, he said, to keep two horses for her, and had given her a chance of riding or driving; she preferred the former, but chose the latter, remembering that it was a pleasure which her dear madame could share.

Mr. Eyre was very fond of his daughter, and, moreover, exceedingly proud of her. He desired intensely for her the advantages of wealth and station, personally indifferent though he was to them. His greatest trouble, his most bitter mortification in life, was that her grandfather would not acknowledge her. For himself he did not care, he had no wish to rise from the position with which his forefathers had been contented; it was enough that he was respected, and owed no man anything. Starving, he would not have begged a crust from Sir Howard; but for the love he bore his pretty Winifred, he would have humbled himself to the dust before the proud baronet, if by that means he could have induced him to notice his grandchild. Once, at his instigation, Mme. de Montolieu had mentioned Winifred to Sir Howard. An angry flash darkened his brow as he said, sternly:

"Madame, I feel no interest in hearing of Miss Eyre, and I beg in future you will spare me all allusion to the issue of a disgraceful connection."

The gentle old Frenchwoman had conveyed the result of her attempt to Mr. Eyre with characteristic delicacy, but he felt the insult of the refusal keenly. It was his only hope for Winifred, for his own relations were not in posi-

tion to be of use to her. Of his two sisters, one was married to a doctor with a small practice in one of the suburbs of London; the other had become the wife of a farmer; his brother was an attorney in a small country town, so there was nothing to be hoped from them.

Winifred was very gentle and affectionate to her father. Always in the evening she sung, played, or read to him; and sometimes, when he had watched her with a proud delight busied with some refined accomplishment, he would sigh, and say:

"Ah! my child, you were born for something better than a poor farmer's daughter."

But if Winifred at times chafed because she was the unnoticed daughter of a poor farmer, she never looked down on or blamed her father. She had no wish to be elevated from her present position without him; she sought no advantage from which he was excluded. She even strove to conceal her regrets from him; but the eyes of love are discerning, and although Mr. Eyre never allowed her to see that her longings were known to him, he was painfully alive to them.

Matters stood thus when my story commences, and this short digression will better enable the reader to understand the bitterness of heart Winifred felt at her cousin's open slight.

Miss Eyre left the town and walked on for about half a mile, until she came to a small white cottage standing back from the road in a pleasant garden, well shaded by old-fashioned fruit-trees. Two tiny bay-windows, almost hidden by clusters of rich red roses, looked out on to a velvet lawn, with trim beds of various-colored verbenas; and outside the door was a trellised porch, covered with fragrant jasmine. Winifred did not stand on the ceremony of knocking, but raised the latch and entered the drawing-room, where Mme. de Montolieu was sitting before her embroidery-frame. She looked up with a glad smile, and, rising, kissed the young lady on both cheeks.

"Ah! my rosebud," she exclaimed, "you have come at last."

"Yes, dear madame," Winifred replied, "but I have not been wholly successful in executing your commissions. See!" she added, "this green wool is a shade lighter than the pattern, but I thought it would scarcely matter, as

your other greens are so much deeper. The red is the right color, but it seems to me a little faded from lying in the shop. It is impossible to get exactly what you want in these little country towns."

"Both will do excellently well, my child; I thank you," returned Mme. de Montolieu, putting on her spectacles. "The difference in the green is scarcely perceptible, and my old eyes fail to detect the want of freshness in the red."

Then she looked fondly at Winifred's face; but something she saw there brought an increased gravity over her placid features.

"My love!" she said, gently, "has anything happened to distress you?"

The quick tears sprung to Winifred's eyes, but for a moment she was silent. Then she essayed to smile, answering:

"It is my pride, for which you so often chide me, that has been hurt, dear madame."

But the attempt to smile was very feeble—the brown eyes began to swim, and Winifred fairly hid her face in her hands and cried. Mme. de Montolieu said nothing; she sat down on the sofa beside her favorite, and stroked her brown hair caressingly, waiting until she could recover. Suddenly Winifred raised her head, shook the tears proudly from her lashes, and turned to her friend:

"It is unworthy," she exclaimed, "to be so moved by a trifle. I shall make you laugh when I tell how small a thing has provoked me to this outburst of indignation."

But the kind old lady did not laugh—she was full of pitiful tenderness for the feelings of youth, and sympathized keenly with the wounds of a sensitive nature like Winifred's. She heard the story through without once interrupting it—only now and again pressing the hand she held, gently. It is wonderful how human nature is relieved by confiding its troubles to a willing ear; and how pain, both of mind and body, is lessened by talking of it. I think Jupiter must have been indeed resentful, when he doomed an offending goddess to perpetual silence for having spoken scandal of him. In relating her story, too, Winifred remembered what her anger with her cousin had caused her to forget, the stranger's admiration. The recollection brightened her face considerably.

"Madame!" she said suddenly, after a pause, "who do you think the gentleman with Miss Champion could be?"

"I can not tell, my love; probably a visitor at the Manor."

"But, madame, I have heard that both Sir Howard and Mr. Champion are absent, and, under those circumstances, it is hardly probable there would be gentlemen staying in the house! I know it was not one of Lord Lancing's sons, nor Sir Charles Ashton, nor Mr. Annesley, and there is no one else about here."

"Stay, my love, may it not have been Mr. Hastings? I hear he has just returned from abroad, and you know his father and Sir Howard were great friends. Perhaps he at last feels a desire to see the beautiful home of his fathers, which he has neglected so long. Can you describe him at all?"

"I only saw him a moment," returned Winifred, blushing, "but his face seemed rather bronzed with travel; from what I remember, I fancy he had dark-blue eyes and fair hair."

"I think, then," remarked Mme. de Montolieu, "that my surmise is correct, for dark-blue eyes and golden hair are the family characteristics. I remember the father of this young man a great many years ago, and he was exactly what you describe the gentleman whom you saw to-day. There is, I believe, an old saying about the great resemblance which all the men of the Hastings family bear to each other."

Winifred rose to go.

"I must not stay longer now," she said, "or papa will be waiting for his tea; but I shall come in to-morrow and bring you some of my little bantam's eggs, which you are so fond of. I never feel that the day is well spent unless I have seen you."

"Good-bye, dear child," said the old lady, kissing her fondly. "God bless you, and give you strength to rise above the small mortifications and troubles that we are all subject to here."

Winifred turned homeward with a lighter heart. She had almost forgotten the affront that had been put upon her; but she could not forget the eager look of admiration that had crossed the handsome stranger's face as he turned to look at her. Without doubt he was Mr. Hastings, the

owner of all the property about—of the very wood through which she was even then passing on her way to the farm. And a very bright smile came on her lips as she thought how near he lived, and that she might perhaps see him sometimes in her walks. It would be some relief to the monotony of her life, only to be able now and then to gaze on a handsome face like his.

CHAPTER IV.

A DREAM OF FAIR WOMEN.

A WEEK had passed since Winifred's *rencontre* with her cousin, but she had neither seen nor heard anything more of the supposed Mr. Hastings. But she had not forgotten him; his handsome face haunted her sleep, and in the daytime her hands would ever and anon fall idle in her lap, and the dreamy eyes would seem to see his eager gaze turned upon her. She was unusually listless, and her father remarked it. One evening, after tea, he said:

"My dear, you look pale; I don't think you've been out to-day."

"No, papa, it has been so hot," answered Winifred; "but I shall go up in the woods this evening—the air will be cooler then. Won't you come with me?" she added, pleadingly; "do, there's a dear old papa."

"I think I can to-night, dear; I had an appointment with Farmer Hayes, but he sent word this afternoon that he should not be able to come; so, if you'll put on your hat at once, we'll be off."

Winifred ran to equip herself; but when she came down again, a disappointment was in store for her. In spite of his fears to the contrary, Mr. Hayes *had* found it convenient to keep the appointment with Mr. Eyre; and as it related to business which would take at least a couple of hours to settle, Winifred was compelled to go out alone. She called her little Scotch terrier, and set off listlessly for her walk; but the evening was sultry, and she felt no inclination to go far. She made straight for the woods, and, choosing a picturesque spot, sat down to rest. An opening had been cut between the thick-growing oaks and beeches, and beyond, in the distance, lay a fertile valley of ripening corn-

fields and thick, luxuriant hedges; around her grew tall ferns and fox-gloves in wild abundance; and on the banks tiny scarlet strawberries nestled under their mass of green leaves. There was no sound but the occasional song of birds and the rustling of leaves, as an adventurous squirrel bounded about in the branches overhead.

Winifred sat gazing out on to the scene before her, but scarcely seeing it, so wrapped was she in her own thoughts. A young girl's thoughts—at least, those who have any soul at all—will shape themselves into romance, and the romance must needs have a hero. I believe the longing for love and admiration to be an absorbing idea with very young girls. It is their dream to have lovers at their feet, to inspire a passion, to be worshiped. Is there a girl of sixteen who has not had a passionate longing to be beautiful and admired?

Winifred desired admiration with all her heart; but it must be from those whose rank or qualities would make it worth the having. She had all the foolish, natural longings of youth; the desire for beauty, for wealth, for position, for society, for all those things that seem to them the essentials of life. She had not yet gained the bitter experience that comes too soon to all; the discovery that when we reach our hands to pluck what we believe to be the best gifts the world contains they turn to dust and ashes in our hands. Thrice happy they who can still hope and believe, who have not turned away heart-sick and weary, with the oft-repeated cry on their lips, "All is vanity!"

And Winifred looked with dreamy eyes on the landscape before her, and thought how dearly she would like to live in London, and be one of the gay world, and go to Court, and drive in the Park, and be courted and admired, and do all that fashionable people did. And then she sighed, and thought how far removed she was from participation in the joys of her Paradise—the world. A few months back the aunt who lived in London had invited her to spend a week, and she had gone. The house in which Mrs. Randal lived was a semi-detached, stuccoed, residence, in a very new and glaring district, and the establishment was conducted with an attempt at gentility which grated severely on Winifred's refinement. Her aunt, a good-natured woman, had thought to give her niece a treat, and had taken her about to see all the sights, and Winifred would have enjoyed them but for

what she felt to be a false pride, and was thoroughly ashamed of—her dislike to riding in omnibuses.

Winifred had gone into the park, and been engrossed with that sight so absorbing to a novice—the drive in the season. She had stood by the railings, and forgotten that she was being pushed and hustled in a crowd, the reverse of select, in the enchanting sight that lay before her. How elegant the women had seemed, how refined the men! what luxury to ride in those magnificent carriages, how happy their listless, indolent-looking occupants must be! It was a sight she thought she never could tire of; the two hours she stood there seemed to her like ten minutes, and when her aunt tapped her on the shoulder, and told her it was time to go, she could almost have cried with vexation. Turning, they left the brilliant throng behind them, and then Mrs. Randal hailed a passing omnibus, and Winifred mounted into the vulgar, dusty conveyance, with a chafing heart at the humbleness of her position.

All this she recollected to-night in her musings, and then her mind turned to its favorite theme. Ah! she thought, what a glorious existence to have been a queen in society! to have been adored by a thousand lovers for one's wit, or beauty, or grace! How happy must these women have been who by the sole empire of their charms could sway thousands to their will. A Helen of Troy, for whose glorious beauty so many had been content to die, to protect whose name and honor princes had leagued together; an Aspasia, who had numbered Socrates amongst her pupils, who could charm the stern Pericles to her every whim, had ruled the destinies of Athens, and formed its most brilliant orators. A Ninon de l'Enclos, whose wit and beauty were of such rare order that even the well-born and virtuous of her own sex, tolerating her frailty, had sought her friendship; whom the *savants* of the day had consulted on their works—Scarron on his romances, St. Evremont on his poems, Molière on his comedies, Fontenelle on his dialogues, and Rochefoucauld on his Maxims; an Hypatia, whose virtues, learning and beauty had charmed all the great and learned men of Alexandria, until Cyril, the haughty priest, waxing jealous of her power, had caused her to be barbarously murdered; a Marguerite of Valois, a Recamier, an Anne Boleyn, a Maintenon.

“But then,” reflected Winifred, “madame says that

nearly all those women were more or less wicked, and it is not well to wish to be like them. But I should not care to have been De Staël; she was so coarse, and plain and clumsy. Fancy having it said of one as of her, when she mounted a pedestal as an antique figure, regardless of her large feet, '*Voilà un vilain pied de Staël!*' I should not care to have been a Sévigné, a Hannah Moore, a Hemans, or a Genlis, and madame says they were much more estimable. After all, though, it was not all triumph and happiness with my beauties. What remorse Helen must have suffered for the slain thousands before she died, strangled by the order of the revengeful Polyxo! Aspasia must have felt many a keen regret for the baneful influence her relations with Pericles cast over Athens; and how could Del'Enclos have survived the horror of her son's death? Hypatia had been as good as beautiful, but she had died a horrible death. Marguerite de Valois must have been bitterly angered by her husband's indifference and preference for Gabrielle d'Estrees. Anne Boleyn was the victim of a tyrant's jealousy; and Madame de Maintenon's regret for her ingratitude to De Montespan imbibited the whole of her after-life; even Recamier's very beauty caused her trouble by exciting the jealousy of Napoleon. And so, perhaps, after all," concluded Winifred, with a sigh, "it is better to live ignobly in obscurity than to rise to the altitude of triumphs which must be followed by the depths of despair. I think I could be content to have only one lover; but then he must be something I could look up to and admire—almost worship—not a clumsy young farmer like Mr. Tom Fenner. How can papa tolerate his foolish, ill-bred jests, and praise him when he is gone? I wonder if I lived here for years to come, never seeing or speaking to a well-bred man, until I became heartless, and hopeless, and weary of my life—I wonder if I could make up my mind to become the wife of a man like Mr. Fenner? I wonder if I should degenerate into a commonplace housewife, and look after the pigs and poultry, and make the butter, and sit with him while he smoked his pipe, and drank his gin and water of a night, taking no heed of the horrible stable smell in his clothes?"

Winifred's speculations were suddenly cut short by a yap from her terrier, and turning sharply round, she beheld her little companion rolling over and over down the bank under

the sudden and unprovoked assault of a huge mastiff. She uttered a little cry of fright, and sprang to the rescue, when she heard a crashing of the branches at her side, a sharp, "To heel; Rollo!" from a man's voice, and the third occupant of Mrs. Champion's barouche stood before her. A sudden recognition, a hasty apology, and he stood looking at her, hat in hand, with the same expression of admiration in his eyes that she had seen there before. There was a pause, during which the startled Winifred blushed, and felt painfully confused.

"I fear my dog has alarmed you," said the stranger, at last; "he is rather wont to be aggressive to his species, particularly in this wood, of which he is accustomed to consider himself sole monarch."

"Then I fear we are trespassers," Winifred found courage to answer; "but we have always been allowed to walk here, and—"

"I shall indeed be sorry if our rudeness and inhospitality should drive you away," laughed the stranger. "I beg you will always, both for yourself and friends, consider you are entitled to a free right of way over any and every part of my possessions."

Winifred thanked him and would have turned away, but he lingered; and there was such a charm to her in the presence of this refined, aristocratic-looking man, that she felt no inclination to break rudely away from him.

"You are Mr. Hastings, then?" she said, interrogatively.

"Yes," he replied. "I have come back at last to enjoy the delights of home after my long absence. I almost fancied at one time that I could never weary of travel and new scenes; but at last, the homesickness which they say must come to every one, sooner or later, attacked me, and I longed for England and Hazell Court."

"And your home is so beautiful!" ventured Winifred, looking up at him; "how glad you must be to get back to it!"

"I think I was pleased," Mr. Hastings answered; "home-life seemed to rest every sense after the constant fatigue and excitement of foreign travel. But I could not settle down all at once to its unvarying monotony, so I have been testing the pleasure of another London season."

"You have been in London during the season?—how I envy you!" sighed Winifred.

Mr. Hastings smiled.

"It is a very pleasant, idle, unsatisfactory way of beguiling time—life in London; and I can sympathize more with a woman's love of it than a man's. I must confess, though, that I thoroughly enjoyed this last season; perhaps because it is so long since I have spent a spring in London. You can hardly imagine what a charm there is in the society of Englishwomen when you have been away from your country for some time."

"I thought Frenchwomen's powers of charming were far beyond those of our country-women?" ventured Winifred.

"The *powers* of charming, but not their real charm," answered Mr. Hastings, a little surprised at such a remark from a girl he had been told was only a farmer's daughter. "There is no one, to my taste, at least, comparable to a fine Englishwoman. Frenchwomen are brilliant in conversation and wonderful tacticians, but they are *intrigante* and insincere. Germans are well educated and accomplished, but they are dull and heavy. Italians are too languid and sleepy for my taste, and Spaniards are uneducated, frivolous, and revengeful. A well-bred Englishwoman combines all the charms of other nations without their disadvantages. Their reserve, or, as foreigners call it, prudery, is one of their greatest attractions in my eyes. You see," he added, laughing, "my long stay abroad has not robbed me of all my insular predilections."

"It must be very pleasant to see so much of the outer world," Winifred said, timidly; "it must give one such broad views of things and people, and stamp out one's petty, intolerant thoughts and narrow prejudices."

Mr. Hastings was still more surprised by this last remark of his companion's, but he was far too well-bred to allow his thoughts to appear. He remarked quietly:

"You seem to have considered these things more than young ladies are apt to do."

Winifred cast a hasty glance at him before she spoke again, to be quite sure that her companion was not laughing at her. But no—there was nothing further than a look of grave, well-bred interest on his face, and she felt more courage to reply.

"I dare say my ideas may seem a little old-fashioned," she said, with a slight increase of color, "but I do not know any girls of my own age, and I read a great deal. I have

lived all my life in the country, and have no experience of my own; but my books tell me how the sight of the wonderful and beautiful enlarges the mind, and that a man who has lived the stirring life of great cities, and studied the works of art and nature, must be more generous-minded and tolerant in consequence."

She was so eager, so animated in her manner as she uttered the last few words, that her large eyes sparkled and kindled until her face looked almost lovely.

"There is no beauty like that which expression gives," thought Mr. Hastings, as he looked with keen interest at the bright young face. Winifred saw his glance, but did not understand it, and a sudden fear seized her that she had been overbold in speaking her thoughts so openly.

"I beg your pardon," she said, suddenly. "I forgot for the moment that my acquaintance with you did not warrant my giving my opinion so freely."

"Indeed!" he answered, eagerly; "I esteem it a great compliment that you should be able so soon to forget I was a stranger to you."

"I must be going," Winifred uttered, hastily. "it is getting late."

He turned to accompany her, but she bowed with an air of decision, saying:

"My path leads away from Hazell Court."

"I hope," he said, lingering a moment, "that my presence to-night will not tend to frighten you away from these woods for the future. May I rely on your making use of them as usual?"

She thanked him again, and, bowing, turned away. He stood, hat in hand, before her as he might have done to a princess; and as she went on her way home, he gazed after her slight, graceful form with a look of tender admiration such as might have befitted a man who watched the woman he loved.

CHAPTER V.

ERROL HASTINGS.

ERROL ST. GEORGE HASTINGS was the last and sole representative of a very old family. They did not trace their descent from the Norman Bastard: they were far too

proud of their Saxon lineage for that. The simple title of esquire, they boasted, was far more to them than a mushroom earldom or marquissate; *they* had been gentle for centuries, when the forefathers of many now high in rank had dwelt in humble obscurity. The Hastingses had remained staunch to Cœur de Lion when John usurped his throne; one of them had fought by the side of the Black Prince at Crecy; another had died in the Wars of the Roses; they had followed the fortunes of Charles Stuart and his son, and during Cromwell's reign been deprived of their house and lands; in short, they had been mixed up in almost every political trouble that had distracted England.

It was a curious fact that the men had always borne a great resemblance to each other; there was hardly a portrait in the long picture-gallery at Hazell Court in which the gold-colored hair and dark-blue eyes were not reproduced. The Hastingses were brave, handsome, generous, gallant men, but an indomitable pride was their chief characteristic; it had been fostered from time to time by intermarriage with noble families, and had seemed almost to grow and increase with every generation. A Hastings had never been known to marry beneath him; there had been wild stories of their loves and gallantries, but there never yet was a woman who could accuse a Hastings of betraying her by a false promise. It was a compact from father to son that the social position and dignity of the family should be kept up by marrying a woman of good birth.

Errol Hastings' mother had been the daughter of an earl, who was quite content to see her the wife of Hastings of Hazell Court. She had been a beauty, and died young—some said of grief, because she could not win the love of her handsome husband.

St. George Hastings, the father of the present man, had been dead four years. The last few years of his life he had been constantly ailing, and obliged to live abroad, and his son, to whom he was passionately attached, scarcely ever left him. It was a severe blow to Errol Hastings when his father died; for a time he was almost inconsolable, and until the commencement of last year, he had never gone into English society. Very handsome, very proud, very accomplished, he was adored by women; and there was a tender deference in his manner toward them which could,

not fail to win their regard. A woman must indeed have been critical who could deny admiration to his stalwart strength, his fine features, and expressive eyes, so proud in their defiance, so tender in their love.

A surer way still to his success with the fair sex was his perfection in all athletic exercises. Women always admire a man who can hunt, and shoot, and swim, and skate, and leap, and fence, and box. He had a fine estate and income too, so that altogether Errol Hastings was a most desirable *parti*. All the pretty women in London had made much of him this season, and he had been courteous, and charming and complimentary in return: still none of them could flatter themselves that they had made a decided impression.

Miss Champion seemed to have attracted him the most powerfully, and it was generally allowed that she had the best chance, as Hurst Manor and Hazell Court lay near together, and the quiet time in the country after a gay season is universally admitted to have the most dangerous fascinations.

Errol Hastings did admire Flora Champion greatly; he liked her haughty manner, her sparkling gayety, and disdainful impertinence—it was so widely removed from the commonplace of ordinary women. I can not venture to say that he had any serious thoughts of proposing to her, but I know the reflection had crossed his mind that it would be very pleasant to have such a woman sit at the head of his table and entertain his guests. But as Errol Hastings turned homeward to dinner on the night of his *rencontre* with Winifred, a nearer and fresher image blotted Flora Champion from his memory.

“What a charming creature!” he thought; “what divine eyes!—what a frank, graceful manner! If I had not known to the contrary, I could have sworn she was the daughter of a nobleman. With that face and that high-bred air, she might pass muster with the proudest woman in London. I can scarcely tell why; but I feel at this moment I would give a thousand pounds to know she was well-born instead of the daughter of a simple country farmer. Where on earth has she got that look of breeding from? She must have had something different from the ordinary run of country schooling to talk in the way she does. I wonder if she heard Miss Champion’s remark that night? It was not

in the best taste, certainly, and it seemed to me she blushed as she turned away."

This soliloquy brought him to Hazell Court. It is not too dark yet for us to look at it. It was a large, handsome, castellated building of gray stone, with spacious wings built out on either side. The latter were recent additions, and contained the ball-room, billiard- and smoking-rooms. A broad-terraced drive led up to the massive oak door-way, which seemed to have been designed for the resistance of a battering-ram; and before the terrace lay luxuriant woods, through which vistas had been cut, disclosing magnificent views in the distance. There were beautiful flower-gardens behind, but Mr. Hastings would not allow a single flower in the front, declaring it destroyed the grandeur of the aspect. All the pleasant morning-rooms looked out on to the back, so that the loss of color in front was scarcely felt. The magnificent banqueting-hall and picture-galleries occupied the greater part of the front, and over them were the old-fashioned tapestried bed-chambers, very rarely used now. The drawing-room, the charming bay-windowed sitting-rooms, and all the bedrooms in use lay on the other side, and looked out over green lawns and shrubberies, over rose-gardens and brilliant flower-beds, to the lovely country beyond, bounded by high green hills.

When Mr. Hastings visited Hazell Court after his long absence, he was struck by the dingy somberness of the draperies and furniture. The old part of the house he would not allow to be interfered with, but all the modern and habitable rooms he caused to be completely transformed. There were three morning-rooms leading one into the other; one had rose-colored silk fittings, the second blue, and the third was a perfect rest to the eyes, with its soft shaded green. Away in the west wing, commanding the finest view, was his own particular haunt, fitted up with every luxury. Silk curtains hung from the walls, sun-blinds shaded the windows without concealing the view, and all about the room were soft couches and chairs, which would have seemed almost as wonderful to our grandfathers as the discovery of steam.

Errol Hastings was undeniably sybarite by nature, although he could be hardy and indifferent to personal comfort on occasion. His luxurious habits had been fostered by a sojourn in the East, and his wealth enabled him

to gratify his tastes to their utmost extent. He had a passion for pictures, but not for collecting them.

"I am surprised, Mr. Hastings," a lady said to him in Rome, "that you, who are such a haunter of galleries, are not possessed by that mania for buying which attacks most of your countrymen."

"My dear countess," answered Hastings, laughing, "it is because the labor would be too herculean. I have seen all the wonderful pictures in the world, and the few indifferent copies of the old masters I should be able to get together would scarcely seem to me worth the having. No, I am quite content that the gems which afford me such delight should remain in the possession of others, as long as they do not deny me the privilege of admiring them. We are supposed to have a very fair collection of art at Hazell Court; three of my ancestors were *connoisseurs*; but it almost makes me laugh when I think of the people who come miles to see what is dignified by the name of the Hazell Gallery. Why, I have seen the masterpieces of all the great painters who ever lived: of Raphael, Michael Angelo, Titian, Annibale Carracci, and Lodovico Carracci, at Bologna; Paul Veronese, Tintoret, Correggio, Rembrandt, Lucca Giordana, Giulio Romano, Leonardo da Vinci, Guido, Salvator Rosa, Giorgione, Rubens, Vandyke, Poussin, Le Sueur, Le Brun, Voet, and others, whose names are as familiar to you as to me. I have admired the battle-pieces of Bourguignon; the French gallantries of Watteau; the landscapes of Claude Lorraine; the sea-views of Vanderfelde; and the hunting bits of Wouverman; and after all that, madame, I am scarcely able to attempt what, with the devotion of a life-time, and the riches of a Cressus, must, after all, be but a puny success."

"I admire your sense," laughed the countess; "but if all your countrymen were of the same opinion, we Italians should miss the golden harvest we reap of their credulity and ignorance. It is enough, generally, to swear by all the saints to an Englishman that a painting is genuine, and he will walk off confidently with the most glaring deception, leaving his gold in its place."

But if Mr. Hastings looked somewhat superciliously on the works of art which his forefathers had labored to bring together, he had a very great reverence and affection for the paintings which hung in the portrait-gallery.

Many a morning he spent there, in the company of his ancestors. There were stiff-looking portraits by Holbein; a grave courtier by Vandyke; the beautiful affected women of Sir Peter Lely; there were Mytenses, Velasquezes, Knel-lers, Gainsboroughs, Reynoldses, and Lawrences; and there was a portrait of every Hastings for centuries back. Nearly all the men were fair-haired and blue-eyed, and, curiously enough, many of the women were dark. There were two portraits before which Errol Hastings spent many an hour—those of his father and mother. St. George Hastings looked very handsome in the uniform of the Guards; and his wife was beautiful and winning, yet withal very sad.

“Is it possible,” he often thought, “that my father could be indifferent to such a lovely, gentle-looking woman as that?”

He did not know the story then which he learned afterward.

During the time we have occupied by this digression, Mr. Hastings had proceeded to his room in the west wing, and rung for dinner. It was a very rare occurrence for him to be alone—he was not particularly enamored of solitude; but to-night he felt no chagrin at being without a companion.

“Letsom,” he said to the old butler, who had grown gray in the service of his father, and always waited on Errol himself when he was alone, “are people generally allowed to walk in the woods?”

“No, sir, I believe not,” responded the old man; “leastways, not as a rule. There’s some as Hawkins lets through at times, but I don’t know of any one he has given a free pass to except pretty Miss Eyre.”

“Miss Eyre! who is she?” inquired Mr. Hastings, half suspecting.

“Well, sir, she’s the daughter of Farmer Eyre, who holds some of your land; but she’s quite a lady for all that, and, I believe, accomplished too, for she’s been brought up by the old French madame who lives hard by here.”

“A French lady?” said Errol, interrogatively.

“Yes, sir,” responded the old butler. “Montyloo I think her name is, but they always call her madame about here. I *have* heard say she was governess up at Sir Howard’s and that he pensioned her off; but that must be a power of years ago now.”

"And this Miss Eyre is pretty, you say?" asked Mr. Hastings.

"Ah, indeed, sir, she is that; and very kind-hearted, too, for all they call her so high and mighty. Hawkins told me she used to go and sit and read to his old mother by the hour together, until the poor old creature died, last May. Why, there's nothing as Hawkins wouldn't do for her. Says he to me, 'I'd die for her willing, that I would; and if it could do her good, I'd lie down and let her wipe her shoes upon me.' I beg pardon, Mr. Errol," concluded the old man abruptly; "I had no business to be talking such nonsense before you—you'll excuse it, I hope, sir?"

"Excuse you?" laughed Errol; "why, I am a regular old woman for gossip. I was quite interested."

Mr. Hastings had a very pleasant way of putting people at their ease. His manner was always gentle and polite to his inferiors, but they would as soon have thought of taking a liberty with him as of teasing an uncaged lion. But Letsom, having outraged his own sense of propriety, was not to be induced into giving further particulars about Miss Eyre. Had he only done so that night, and told his master the story of Winifred's birth and parentage, which he knew by heart, I should probably not have had occasion to write this book. But he remained silent, and was more than ever deferential to Mr. Errol, as he persisted in calling him; and the latter, having concluded his solitary repast, threw himself into a lounging-chair, and betook himself to the enjoyment of a French novel. Wearying after awhile of the purposeless intrigues and nauseating sentimentality, he flung the book to the other end of the room, started up, whistled his dogs, and went out to enjoy a fresh cigar on the broad terrace in the moonlight.

CHAPTER VI.

A VISIT TO HAZELL COURT.

In a very elegant drawing-room, with French windows to the ground, leading on to a velvet sward gemmed with flowers, sat Mrs. Champion and her daughter. The mother was employed on an elaborate piece of wool-work, while Miss Champion, half reclined upon her silken couch, seemed

to have been reading the book she held in her listless hands. She looked up from it to answer her mother's interrogatory.

"Do you think Mr. Hastings will be here this afternoon, Flora?"

"I can not tell, mamma; Reginald has gone over to the Court to lunch, and look at some new horses, and he said he should probably bring Mr. Hastings back to dinner."

"He is very handsome," remarked Mrs. Champion.

Flora assented.

"And rich," added the mother.

Miss Champion again acquiesced.

"Indisputably the best match in the county," continued Mrs. Champion.

"Except Evelyn Vane," remarked Flora.

"Evelyn Vane?" echoed her mother—"Evelyn Vane has nothing until his father dies; and even when he becomes Lord Lancing, his income will not be much more than half that of Mr. Hastings."

"But there is the title," said Miss Champion, "Lord Lancing can not last much longer, and I would rather have a title, even if I were obliged to sacrifice half the income."

Which was not true, for Flora Champion was rather in love with Errol Hastings, and utterly indifferent to the Hon. Evelyn Vane. She and her mother were much attached to each other—at least as much as was possible for two such selfish and indifferent natures to be—and they were wont to indulge in mutual confidences. Flora made Mrs. Champion the *confidante* of her love affairs, and Mrs. Champion did everything to further them. She was wonderfully proud of her elegant, golden-haired daughter, and very anxious to see her what she would have called well established. It was a matter of some solicitude, for Miss Champion was twenty, and had been out two seasons. At this moment Reginald Champion, the only son and brother, entered the room.

"Have you just returned from the Court?" inquired his mother.

"Yes! Hastings left me at the door not five minutes ago."

"I thought he was going to dine here?"

"I thought so too; but I suppose he changed his mind, for when he arrived here, and I pressed him to come in, he

declared he had a previous engagement, which he had quite forgotten when he accepted my invitation. It was all a lie, though, I could see; but I think I know what the counter attraction was."

"Indeed!" said Flora, disdainfully, speaking for the first time; "and may we inquire the result of your penetration?"

"It is nothing that will please you, Flo, I can tell you."

"Then perhaps you had better keep your agreeable intelligence to yourself," returned Miss Champion.

"Certainly," acquiesced her brother.

"Don't be provoking, Reginald!" uttered his mother, sharply; "tell us at once what you mean."

"Ah! I thought you were both dying to know," laughed Reginald; "and I suppose I must gratify your lawful curiosity. Shall I begin at the beginning?"

"Wherever you please," said Mrs. Champion, coldly.

"Very well, then. I went over to lunch with Hastings, as you know, and after lunch we had a game of billiards, and then went into the stables to look at the horses. And, by Jove! such horses too! He has the handsomest pair of bright chestnuts I ever saw—matched to a hair; three perfect hunters, and three thorough-bred bays and a roan for his four-in-hand, besides three or four saddle-horses. And he has promised to let me handle the ribbons," continued Reginald with enthusiasm, "and that I shall tool his team down the drive next season as often as I like. Oh, he's a glorious good fellow, I can tell you. I don't wonder a bit at all the women falling in love with him. By gad! you know he's a princely fellow."

"But to come to your story," interrupted his mother, quietly.

"Story?—what story?" said Reginald. "Oh, ah, to be sure, I recollect. Well, after we had left the stables, and smoked and chatted a bit, he ordered the chestnuts round, and we started to come over here. By Jove! how those horses did fret, and prance, and rear! But he took it as coolly as possibly, and soothed and quieted them, until they went off like lambs. They continued very quiet for about a mile, when we came to a gate where a girl was standing, and then they shied and reared again, until I thought they would have upset us in the ditch. But Hastings was not a bit disconcerted; he held the reins with one

hand, and with the other took off his hat to the girl as if she had been an empress. She was so graceful, and had such lovely eyes, I was anxious to know who she could be, and asked him. Guess, Flo, who it was."

"How should I know?" answered his sister, pettishly. "How provoking you are!"

"Well, then, it was our cousin, Miss Eyre; and I can tell you she is nothing to be ashamed of either. I could see how much he admired her, and was just going to tell him of our connection with her, when the chestnuts bolted, and, by the time he got them in hand again, it had gone out of my mind. However, the information will keep till another time."

"Reginald," cried his sister, white to the lips with rage, "you will not dare to tell him that low-born girl is related to us?—you will not dare?"

"Reginald knows better than to do anything so foolish," interrupted Mrs. Champion. "But in case you should be tempted to do so," she added, turning to her son, "remember that not a tithe of that five hundred pounds I promised you for your last season's debts shall pass into your hands."

"Oh! very well, that's enough," responded Reginald, sulkily. "But I can tell you one thing, Flo—I believe he's tremendously cut with that girl, and that he's gone off after her now."

And having uttered this remark with the amiable intention of annoying his sister, he proceeded to quit the room, slamming the door behind him.

"I think Reginald gets more unbearable every day," exclaimed Flora, angrily.

"Twenty-one is not generally a very agreeable age in a young man," remarked her mother, who was not so devoted to him as mothers generally are to only sons. "They are boys without youthfulness, and men without discretion."

Which was very true, as far as that gentleman was concerned. He was unamiable, conceited, and impertinent, with an overweening sense of his own importance, as prospective heir to a large fortune and a baronetcy; but he had just sense enough to perceive the advisability of making himself agreeable when the effort was likely to gain him any advantage, and to conceal his unpleasant qualities when he thought it worth his while.

"I have no doubt," began Mrs. Champion, presently,

"that since the day she first saw Mr. Hastings, and he pretended to admire her, that forward girl has taken every opportunity of putting herself in his way."

"I really do not see what he can find to admire in her," said Flora, contemptuously.

"Oh, she is a good figure, and has large eyes," replied the mother. "Men always do admire those great brown eyes. I am sure I can not tell why. I think them vulgar."

"At all events, something must be done about it," rejoined Miss Champion. "He must not see much of her if we can help it; above all things he must not know she is the daughter of papa's sister."

"That is, if you think seriously of him yourself," said Mrs. Champion, interrogatively; "otherwise, I do not see what difference it makes to us."

"Oh, mamma! how tiresome you are! Of course I think seriously of him."

"But you said just now, my dear, you would prefer a title, and, I thought, seemed to incline rather toward Evelyn Vane."

"Well, whether I want him or not, I am determined she shall not have him," said Flora, with a very unamiable expression of countenance clouding her fair face—"not that I imagine for one moment he would think of marrying her. At all events, as long as he does not know the secret of her birth, he is safe enough; for a Hastings would as soon cut off his right hand as marry a woman he believed to be low-born. To think how nearly that stupid Reginald betrayed it! I really don't think he has a grain of sense." And so the fates conspired to keep a secret from Errol Hastings, which, as it turned out, was very important he should know.

He called at Hurst Manor the day after Reginald lunched with him, and accepted Mrs. Champion's invitation to stay and dine.

"Mrs. Champion," he said, as they sat together in the drawing-room, "I am going to beg a favor of you and Miss Champion."

"I am sure we shall be but too happy to grant it, if it is in our power," she returned, smiling.

"I think of giving a ball at the Court," Mr. Hastings continued, "and before I issue my invitations, I want to secure the promise of your presence and co-operation."

"A ball at the Court: that will be charming!" exclaimed

Miss Champion, with unusual animation. "Bachelors always give such charming parties; besides which, it will gratify my long-felt desire to go over your house."

"If you really have any curiosity to see my demesme, I trust you will not wait for the ball. Why not ride over this afternoon before dinner? Your brother, I have no doubt, will accompany us."

Miss Champion looked at her mother in a dutiful, interrogative manner, and Mrs. Champion replied immediately:

"Certainly, my love, if you can persuade Reginald. You look a little pale—a ride will do you all the good in the world."

Reginald being agreeable, the horses were ordered round, and Miss Champion left the room to equip.

"*A propos* of the ball," said Errol, "I am expecting an influx of visitors to the Court, and I shall beg of your charity to come and help me to entertain them. Sir Clayton and Lady Grace Farquhar are coming for a fortnight, until their place at Endon Vale is ready, and she has promised to play hostess for the occasion. Lady St. Ego and her daughters will come up from Hertfordshire. Mr. and Mrs. Rivers, Lady Marion Alton and her niece, and several bachelor friends, so I shall need some assistance in my novel part of host."

"When is the ball to take place?" inquired Mrs. Champion.

"I hardly think I am justified in dignifying my gathering by the name of a ball; but I mean to invite every one round for twelve miles; and as this is such a very quiet time of the year, I do not apprehend many disappointments. Indeed, I only intend giving ten days' notice."

"That will be quite enough," Mrs. Champion agreed; "no one thinks of giving parties in the country at this time of year, and a ball will be quite a boon to the young people. I prophesy your entertainment will be a great success."

"I hope so," said Mr. Hastings. "I assure you I shall spare no pains to make everything go off well."

Flora came in at this juncture, looking very handsome in her perfectly fitting habit, and they all walked out of the window to the horses, which were waiting at the door. He placed her in the saddle, mounted himself, and bidding *au revoir* to Mrs. Champion, they started for their ride.

Reginald usurped the greater part of the conversation on the way, much to his sister's annoyance; but she had no intention of betraying any ill-humor before Mr. Hastings. When they arrived at Hazell Court, they dismounted, sent the horses to the stables, and proceeded to explore the house. Miss Champion not only expressed herself, but was in reality, delighted with everything she saw. After she had been through the banqueting hall and picture-galleries, she turned to Errol and said:

"I have never seen any place before that so thoroughly realized my idea of what an old baronial hall ought to be, as this does. There is the genuine antiquity here, not the attempt to make new things old that one sees so much of now, and which jars so painfully on one's notions of what they should be. Your portrait-gallery is the most charming I ever saw, with its lofty ceiling, and somber oak wainscoting. I suppose every one who sees the pictures there remarks on the wonderful resemblance of your ancestors—do they not, Mr. Hastings?"

"Yes, it is rather a general subject of comment," replied Errol, laughing. "By the way, Miss Champion, did you ever hear the rude traditional verses of our family? They have been handed down, I believe, for as many as twelve generations."

"No, indeed," said Flora; "I have heard something of the existence of a poetical tradition, but never the verses themselves. Do tell me them."

"I doubt if they would find a place in any collection of poetry," laughed Errol; "but you shall judge for yourself:

" ' Trust a Hastings with your life
If he have the Saxon hair;
Trust a Hastings with your wife
If he have the Saxon eyes.

" ' But a Hastings should you find
With eyes and hair of darkest hue,
Trust him not with wife or life,
Or your trusting you will rue.'

And curiously enough," continued Mr. Hastings, "whenever there has been such a *rara avis* as a dark Hastings, he has always been a most unmitigated ruffian. Fortunately there have been but three in the family; but their histories are very dark ones. There is a terrible story

of one of them, who ran away with his friend's wife, shot her husband in a duel, and then, when she went mad and died from his cruelty and her own remorse, he shot himself in one of the rooms upstairs."

Flora shuddered. "How horrible!" she exclaimed; "is the room ever shown?"

"No, not now; it used to be quite one of the show-rooms until my mother came here, and then she had it locked up, and would not allow any one but the housekeeper to go into it. Some of the old people will still tell you it is haunted."

When the old part of the house had been explored, he took her to the ball-room and the charming apartments he had especially designed for his guests. Flora was delighted with everything, and paid the most delicate little compliments on his taste, which he received with deprecating humility, but an undeniable sense of gratification. Then they went off to the stables, where they found Reginald, who had not cared to accompany them in their exploring visit; and Hastings showed her the barouche, and a pony-carriage he had ordered down from London, for the especial service of his lady-guests.

Flora was rather silent as she rode home. She was thinking how pleasant it would be to be the wife of a man like Errol Hastings, and the mistress of a place like Hazell Court. He was speaking to her in low, earnest tones; and as he passed the Farm did not turn to look for Winifred. And Winifred, sitting under her favorite clump of beeches, book in hand, looked with wistful eyes after them; and when he had passed out of sight, without once turning to look for her, she hid her face in her hands and cried bitterly.

CHAPTER VII.

OENONE.

POOR Winifred! it was only the day before that Errol Hastings had sat with her under those very beeches, and talked to her in the low, fascinating tones peculiar to him when addressing women. And she had fancied she read love in his deep-blue eyes. They had met more than once since the adventure in the wood, and he had always stopped

to speak to her. And the previous day, as she had been sitting reading in the garden, she had heard the prancing of hoofs, and, looking up, had seen him pull up his fiery chestnuts, which had frightened her so an hour before in the lane, and, throwing the reins to the groom, jump down and enter the little gate.

I must pause a moment to give the gentle reader a short description of Winifred's home, Eyre Farm, or, as it was generally called by the people about—the Farm.

It was a rambling, picturesque-looking, white house—one might almost have called it three-sided—with odd-looking gables and latticed windows. There were pretty, trailing creepers climbing up the walls, and there was a charming garden in front. All the farm buildings lay at the back, out of sight. Some two years before, at Winifred's earnest entreaty, Mr. Eyre had consented to have the garden laid out afresh after her own design. She had caused the whole to be covered with soft green turf from the common, which had been rolled down into a smooth velvety lawn. She had had round flower-beds cut here and there, and filled with masses of geraniums and dark-blue lobelia, and all along the wire railings, which divided the garden from the old coach-road, were planted standard roses of the finest sorts. On the opposite side of the road was an extensive common, covered with furze and bracken, and relieved here and there by clumps of firs; and behind that again stretched a long range of trees as far as the eye could see, which were in the woods of Mr. Hastings's park.

Winifred's heart beat fast as she saw Mr. Hastings coming up the garden toward her.

"I have come to call on Mr. Eyre—is he at home?" Errol asked.

"No," replied Winifred; "he has been out since two o'clock, and I do not expect him until the evening."

"I am sorry," Errol had answered, looking in her face, as he always did now; "but if you will allow me to make his absence to-day an excuse for calling again, I shall not regret it too much."

"Can I say anything to him for you?" asked Winifred.

"I am afraid not," Mr. Hastings said, smiling; "it is on a question of a new method of farming, which I fear is

too abstruse for me to discuss with you. But I am interrupting your reading—is your book very engrossing?”

And as he spoke he glanced at the cover of the book, and observed with some surprise that it was an old French romance.

“Oh, no,” Winifred returned quickly. “I have read it over and over again; but I am so badly off for books, that when I have gone through Madame de Montolieu’s repertoire and my own, I am forced to begin and go through them over and over again.”

“Are you fond of reading French?” Errol asked.

“Very,” answered Winifred; “and although I know there is much that is very silly in the old romances that I read, I can not help liking them, because they are something different from our own matter-of-fact style.”

“Will you let me send you some books to read?” Errol said, gently. “I make a point of collecting all the best works, both foreign and English, and it would be such a pleasure to me to think some one beside myself would take an interest in reading them. I was regretting only the other morning that they were in danger of getting dusty on their shelves for want of use.”

“Oh, how kind you are!” exclaimed Winifred, eagerly, blushing with delight; “it would be such a treat to have something new to read.”

“What shall it be?” asked Mr. Hastings—“history, novels, poetry, or theology?”

“You will quite intoxicate me by such riches of learning,” Winifred said, looking up in his face with a bright smile. “But since you give me my choice, there are three things I have the greatest desire to read: Thiers’ ‘History of the Revolution,’ Bulwer’s ‘What Will He Do With It,’ and Tennyson’s ‘Miscellaneous Poems.’”

“May I ask you why you take such an interest in Thiers’ Revolution?” inquired Errol.

“Oh!” answered Winifred, “you know I have heard so much of the Revolution from Madame de Montolieu. She has told me such sad, pitiful stories of the time, that I want to read all about it myself, and see if what I have heard is just and impartial. I want to know if the mob were really so horribly and unjustifiably cruel, and if these terrible Poissardes of the Halle were actually fiends in human shape. It may be that they had wrongs and cruel-

ties to avenge, and their cause was not wholly without justice; although, when the flower of the French noblesse was in their power, they had no discrimination, in their thirst for blood, to choose between the innocent and the guilty."

"It is a hard matter to judge between a people and their rulers," Errol replied, gravely; "more especially when our sympathies are enlisted on the governing side. But I shall be very glad to send you the book, that you may form your own opinion, and you shall have the others at the same time. I can vouch for you being greatly pleased with Bulwer's book; the language and conception are so fine, and there is a great deal of stirring pathos too. When you read Tennyson, look for my favorite poem, 'Enone'; I am sure you will agree with me in admiring that. Do you sometimes indulge in romance, Miss Eyre?"

"Sometimes," laughed Winifred. "Do you?"

"Yes," said Errol. "I must plead guilty, although I am long past the age when that youthful foible is permissible. But when I am alone I like to sit and look at a beautiful landscape, until my very power of vision is absorbed in thought; and I like to go back centuries, and live in the past ages, that from their wide distance from us seem golden. Do you ever fancy you would like to have been one of the celebrities of the olden times? I should like to have been Alexander, and conquered the world; or a Leonidas, dying gloriously in battle; an undaunted hero, like Alcibiades; an emperor, like Cæsar; a Mark Antony, beloved by Cleopatra; or a Launcelot, if you might have been Guinevere."

His voice had dropped while he was speaking, and as he uttered the last sentence in a low, thrilling whisper, his eyes sought hers with a passionate expression of admiration.

Winifred colored deeply, and the tone of her voice was haughty as she made answer, looking far away into the woods:

"I would not have been Guinevere to the noblest Launcelot who ever breathed. Had I been chosen by such a god-like knight as King Arthur, I think I could have appreciated him too well to requite his love with falseness."

"I beg your pardon; I ought to have remembered; but for the moment I did not think of her falseness, I only rec-

collected that she was beautiful and charming. Do you know those lines of Tennyson, describing her as she rode down the forest glade with Sir Launcelot of the Lake?

“ ‘ A man had given all other bliss,
And all his worldly worth for this,
To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips.’ ”

Errol had never once taken his eyes off Winifred's face while he had been speaking. He had noted every alteration of her expressive face; first the haughty look, then the half-vexed, half-pleased expression, then the quick, kindling blush, and the drooping of the lovely, half-ashamed eyes. And, as he watched her, he thought that of all the women he had ever known, none had such a sweet grace of womanliness as this one, none had ever had the power to kindle such deep passion in him as this graceful girl might, if she listed. He rose suddenly, to flee the temptation.

“ Pardon my intrusion, Miss Eyre; I have detained you already too long.”

And Errol Hastings held out his hand to her. She put her own timidly into it, and he clasped it for a moment with a strong, passionate clasp, looking into her eyes the while with a look that brought the blood rushing to her face. Then he turned slowly, and went back to his phaeton. And Winifred sat under the beeches, her hands clasped together, her eyes looking dreamily into the distance, while the old French romance lay unheeded at her feet. She felt a tremulous delight fluttering at her heart, and yet she was scarcely sure that she was altogether pleased. Had he been right in speaking so to her? And yet his manner had been so courtly and deferential, it was impossible he could have intended any disrespect. And then, as she remembered the expression of his eyes as he bade her farewell, her heart glowed with triumph. Her reverie had reached this agreeable point when the current of her thoughts was diverted by seeing Mr. Tom Fenner sauntering leisurely down the road, hitting off the tops of the grass viciously with his stick. She had seen him pass before, when she was talking with Mr. Hastings, and his presence annoyed her. He came deliberately in at the garden gate, and walked up to where she sat.

“ Good-afternoon, Miss Eyre,” he said, putting out his

great, coarse hand to her. "I suppose I may come in, now you are disengaged?"

Winifred was compelled to give him her hand, sorely as it chafed her that his coarse, heavy touch should brush off the tender clasp of Mr. Hastings' lithe fingers. If Mr. Fenner wanted to make a favorable impression, he could not have chosen a more unfortunate time for his visit. Contrasted with her late visitor, he seemed to Winifred the incarnation of coarseness and vulgarity.

"Certainly you may come in," she answered, coldly; "you might have done so when you passed before. I was not particularly engaged."

"Oh, you did see me, then? I thought you were too much occupied with your fine new friend to look at me."

Winifred was beginning to get angry; this man had never presumed to use such a tone to her before.

"Do you want to see my father?" she asked, abruptly.

"No, I don't; I left him not an hour ago in the turnip field—I want to see you!"

"Oh, very well," remarked Winifred; "but please let me know at once what you want of me, it is time to go in and see about the tea."

"Oh, you weren't in such a hurry just now, when you had that puppy of a Hastings here," said Mr. Fenner, wrathfully.

Winifred rose like a young Juno, with such an imperial air of amazed indignation that her companion quailed.

"Has the man been drinking?" she thought; "he never could dare to speak to me in this way else."

"Oh, I didn't mean to offend you, Miss Eyre," he exclaimed, somewhat abashed; "but, of course, when a fellow goes to see any one with something on his mind to say, and when he gets there and finds another fellow where he wants to be, why, of course, you know, it is aggravating."

"Mr. Fenner," said Winifred, with growing astonishment, "have you any idea of what you are talking about, because I can not form the remotest conception?"

"Look here, Miss Winifred," uttered Fenner, with great earnestness—"it's no use your pretending not to understand me, because you can't have mistaken my meaning this last month. I've loved you for this year back, only my mother said, 'Wait a bit, Tom; she's too young yet; in another year, perhaps, she'll have got out of her

proud, flighty ways, and then ask her, if you like.' And so to-day, in the turnip-field, I spoke to Mr. Eyre, and he said he had no objection, provided you liked me; and I said I wasn't afraid of that, for you had always been so kind in your ways to me, which you wouldn't have been if you hadn't meant as I did."

There were a great many feelings at work in Winifred's breast, as she listened to this speech, but anger predominated. She turned on him at once.

"How dare you say I knew what you meant or gave you encouragement?" she exclaimed, passionately.

"Because you did!" he returned, with temper. "If you didn't mean anything by your smiles, and tricks, and ways, you must be as false as false."

"Enough of this!" cried Winifred, imperiously. "Understand, once for all, that I never had, and never shall have, the remotest feeling of love for you; and if you wish me to entertain the slightest regard for you, you will never again adopt such a tone to me as you have done to-day."

Mr. Tom Fenner was mean-spirited and malicious by nature, so he could not pocket his disappointment like a man, and go off without a grudge, but must revenge himself for his mortification as an opportunity offered.

"So," he said, in an insolent tone, "you could be all very well to Tom Fenner, the farmer, until your fine new lover came along; but you must turn high and mighty directly you've been seen with a London swell. But I can tell you one thing, Miss Winifred," he added, with an insulting air that was indescribable, "Hastings of Hazell Court don't mate with farmers' daughters."

Winifred trembled with passion in every nerve; she could scarcely command her voice sufficiently to speak.

"You insolent, mean-spirited coward!" she cried at length, stamping her foot; "leave this place immediately, and never presume to enter it again!" and she turned into the house and shut the door. Then she ran up to her room, and, throwing herself on her knees by her bedside, she sobbed and cried passionately.

When Mr. Eyre came in, his daughter greeted him with passionate reproach:

"Papa, how could you allow that hateful man to come here and insult me with his odious offer?"

"My dear," said her father, gravely, in some surprise, "there is no insult in an honest man's avowal of love."

"There is in his!" cried Winifred, "he is a mean, low, underbred churl. How dare he think that I would stoop to the love of such a one as he!"

"Winifred, my child!" exclaimed her father, sorrowfully, "beware of that false pride. Remember your position—you are only the daughter of an unnoticed farmer. Your grandfather will not acknowledge you, and what have you to hope for? Would to God, my dear, I could see you placed in that position from which I have never ceased to regret I took your mother—but that seems impossible. I see nothing for you but a humble, commonplace lot; and when I gave my consent to Tom Fenner's speaking to you, it was with the remembrance that, far beneath you though he is, I can look forward to no better station for you than the wife of an honest, well-to-do farmer. He meant well, Winifred; I do not think it was wise of you to repulse him with pride and harshness."

"He was so insolent, papa!"

But as Winifred could not tell her father the real truth of the story, she was compelled to let him remain under the impression that she had acted unkindly and foolishly, which was a sore trial to her. Presently Mr. Eyre rose, and contrary to his wont, took up his hat and left the house without saying where he was going. She sat for a long time motionless, her face hidden in her hands, and now and then a great tear fell through her closed fingers. At last she rose and went to her piano. She sat there until it grew quite dark, singing low, sweet songs to herself, until at last the cloud was chased away from her face, and bright thoughts began to bring smiles in place of tears.

"He *must* care a little for me," she thought, "or he would not have held my hand so long, and looked into my face as he did."

Her thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a ring at the bell, and she paused in her playing.

"Some books for Miss Eyre, with Mr. Hastings' compliments," said a man's voice, to the servant who answered the door.

When it was closed again, she jumped up and called:

"Elizabeth!"

"Yes, miss."

"Give them to me, and bring the lamp, please."

And she began with eager delight to examine the handsomely-bound volumes. She took up Tennyson first, to look for Mr. Hastings' quotation of "Guinevere," which had rung in her ears ever since, and then she went on to "Enone." As she read the beautiful impassioned song of the deserted wife, that vivid-pictured poem of sadness, the tears fell from her eyes, and one stained the page from which she read. But it was a happy evening on the whole; her new occupation chased all unpleasant memories away, and when she went to bed she had even forgotten the existence of Mr. Fenner.

But the next day poor Winifred was plunged into the depths of sadness again, for Mr. Hastings passed, bending over his saddle to talk to her stately cousin, and had never once turned to look for her.

"So"—she thought bitterly—"he is only amusing himself with the farmer's daughter; his real devotion and admiration are for the proud, beautiful Miss Champion."

And with choking sobs she took up the Tennyson that lay at her feet, and read "Enone's" sorrowful plaint again and again:

"Oh, mother, hear me yet before I die,
Hath he not sworn his love a thousand times?
In this green valley, under this green hill,
Ev'n on this hand, and sitting on this stone?
Sealed it with kisses? watered it with tears?
Oh, happy tears, and how unlike to these!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRIDE OF A RACE.

HAD it been possible for Winifred to guess Errol Hastings' real feelings, she would have been forced to confess how greatly she had misjudged him. He was for the first time in his life, unreasonably, bewilderingly, in love, and his judgment was at war with his passion. Reflection did not help him either.

"I have heard," he thought, "of men counting the world well lost for a woman's sake. I never realized the feeling until now. Now I feel that I would give all I possess if I could raise her to my position, or sink to hers."

She is only a bright, charming child yet, but what divine womanhood she will grow into when she begins to love. I cannot imagine any greater happiness than to look into the depths of those beautiful eyes and read there, 'I love you;' or to take those little slender hands in mine, and hear the confession from her lips. How intensely she would love; how bitterly she would despair! She almost realizes my idea of beautiful-browed CEnone, wandering on Mount Ida, wailing her bitter plaint after Paris had left her for Helen of Troy. I think I could make her love me if I tried. But I will not try; I vowed in my remorse for poor little Ernestine that I would never again seek to win the love of a woman I could not marry; and I will try to keep that vow. But I could not trust myself to stay here and see her often; silence would be impossible. If it were not for our cursed Hastings pride, I might tell her now, this very day, how I love her, and marry her, if she would have me. But that can not be. Have all my ancestors kept their resolve in spite of everything until now, and shall I be the first one to break it by my weakness or cowardice? No! no! no!" he thought, passionately; "the honor of our house first, and then the indulgence of self."

And so Errol made up his mind that he would see Winifred no more—he would not yield to temptation, or expose her to disappointment; and when he passed, the next day, with Miss Champion, he kept his face steadily averted from the Farm, little guessing how bitterly the woman he loved was commenting on his apparent neglect.

Several days passed and the house was full of guests. Every one declared that Hazell Court was the most charming country-house to stay at, and that Mr. Hastings was the perfection of a host. He and Lady Grace Farquhar made the most delightful arrangements for the general amusement; and everybody was amused and pleased in consequence. Croquet had just come into fashion, and as the Court lawns were pronounced perfect for the game, the young men and ladies were indefatigable in playing it. There were *tableaux-vivant* and theatricals in the evening, and riding and driving in the afternoon. Miss Champion and her brother were over at the Court almost every day, somewhat to the chagrin of Lady Ulrica St. Ego, who had resolved to do everything in her power to win Errol Hastings. Her sister, Lady Agneta, had similar inten-

tions to Lord Harold Erskine, who was almost as rich, though not of nearly such old family.

One day when Errol had ordered his four-in-hand to go driving with the gentlemen of the party, Lady Ulrica said, in her sweetest tones:

"Dear Lady Grace, do persuade Mr. Hastings to take us with him this afternoon; we all have such an immense desire to be mounted on a drag."

"What do you say, Mr. Hastings," smiled Lady Grace — "are you willing to have your bachelor party broken in upon?"

"Not only willing, but delighted," answered Errol; "I should not have dared to propose such a charming arrangement. Lady St. Ego, what do you say; will you consent to trust your daughters to my coachmanship? Lady Marion, I shall take every care of Miss Alton."

Lady Marion smiled assent; but the Countess of St. Ego, who was very nervous, made some demur. It was, however, overruled, and the young ladies went off in great delight to prepare for the drive. Miss Champion came in while they were out of the room.

"Oh, Miss Champion," cried Errol, "I am so glad you have come; all the young ladies are going to favor me with their company on my drag; I hope you will make one of the party."

"How delightful!" exclaimed Flora; "do you know, Mr. Hastings, I have so often longed to ask you to take me, but I did not dare."

"Surely," said Errol, lowering his voice, "you would not hesitate to give me the pleasure of gratifying a wish of yours."

He was bent on making love to her now he wanted to drive Winifred's image from his mind, and compel himself to forget her.

The young ladies returned at this moment, equipped for their drive; and it being announced that the horses were at the door, they all proceeded to mount the drag. The remaining ladies watched them from the window; Lady St. Ego, in an ecstasy of apprehension, for it was as much as Errol, on the box, and the grooms at the horses' heads, could do to keep them from starting off.

"Oh, Lady Grace," she cried, "I am certain it is not

safe; they will all be upset, I know. How can Mr. Hastings drive such frantic animals?"

"You need not be alarmed, Lady St. Ego, I assure you," said Lady Grace, in her sweet tones. "I would trust myself with Mr. Hastings if his team were composed of zebras instead of horses."

Meantime the party were all safely mounted, the horses started off with a good deal of prancing, the grooms jumped up behind, and the five gentleman and four ladies went off in great glee.

"Which way shall we go?" Errol asked of Miss Champion, who sat beside him.

"Over the common and up the hill, I think is the prettiest," answered Flora, with the malicious design of passing the Farm, that Winifred might see them.

Errol was vexed that he had asked her—he had very particular reasons for not wishing to pass the Farm; in the first place, he wanted to keep himself from the temptation of seeing Winifred; and in the second the idea of wounding her feelings, if she did care at all for him, by parading his devotion to another woman, was odious to him.

"What can she think of me," he said to himself, "showing such admiration for her one day, and passing her without a look the next? I will not do that again. I will bow to her before all these women; she shall not think me guilty of false pride!"

But just as they came up to the Farm, Winifred, who had been standing at the gate, turned, and walked away to the house.

"By Jove!" cried Lord Harold, "what an elegant woman! Miss Champion, you are the great authority in the country—please tell me who that young beauty is?"

"She is a farmer's daughter," said Flora, coldly; and Errol almost hated her for saying it.

"By Jove!" repeated Lord Harold, with astonished emphasis, "a farmer's daughter! I could have sworn, with that figure and *tournure*, she belonged to one of the best families in the county. I was just indulging a hope, Hastings, that we should see her at the ball. Do you know her?"

"Yes," said Errol, gravely, "I have that honor."

Flora glanced at him for a moment to see if he was speaking ironically, but his manner was perfectly grave and serious.

"Could you not invite her?" Lord Harold went on.

"Ask the ladies," answered Errol, with an unwonted tinge of sarcasm, "whether they would consent to the presence of a girl who was *only* a farmer's daughter."

"Indeed, I am sure I would," cried Miss Alton, who was too pretty to be jealous; but the others remained silent.

Lord Harold, seeing the subject did not meet with favor, turned the conversation. He was very much in the habit of saying what he thought, without very strict reference to the proprieties; and as he was good-looking, well-born, and rich, his occasional eccentricities were considered evidences of a charming frankness of disposition.

Winifred had turned away from the gate with a swelling heart.

"He may not care for me," thought the poor child; "but he need not come past so often with his aristocratic friends to show how far above me he is!"

The day before the ball Errol had retired to his sanctum, after lunch, to write two or three letters, when there came a gentle tap at the door.

"Come in!" and Lady Grace appeared on the threshold.

"Will you pardon my intrusion?" she said. "I have always wished to see your haunt, and a request I have to make to you has at last given me a fair pretext."

Mr. Hastings placed one of the luxurious chairs in front of the open window, and his visitor sat down.

"You might have taken my consent for granted," he answered, with a pleasant smile; "but I am quite content that you should think it necessary to ask it since your scruple brings you here."

"What a charming room!" exclaimed Lady Grace, looking round; "you certainly have chosen the most desirable room for your retreat. I almost wonder you are ever tempted out of it. The view from this window is lovely; indeed, it seems quite different from any one I have seen here before. I suppose this is the only point from which you can see that fine purple common?"

"This was my mother's room," Mr. Hastings said, quietly. "I have heard she used to sit here for hours together. You knew her, Lady Grace?"

"Well," answered his companion, with a touch of sadness in her voice; "she was one of the only two dear friends I ever had, and the fate of both was melancholy."

"Tell me, Lady Grace," cried Errol, earnestly, "do you know the reason of her sadness and my father's indifference? I have never even asked the question of any one else, often as I have longed to know."

Lady Grace paused for a moment, then said: "It is a sad story; it would only pain you to hear it."

"Let me judge for myself, dear Lady Grace."

She was silent for a little while, as if thinking, then she looked up in his earnest eyes, and began:

"When Lady Constance d'Estrees married your father, she was passionately attached to him, and believed that he loved her in return, and that the coldness of his manner only proceeded from the proud reserve which is supposed to be a characteristic of your family. She was three years older than I, but we loved each other like sisters, and were inseparable. I remember her so beautiful, so winning, so admired, that it was impossible to imagine that a man on whom she bestowed her affection could be indifferent to her. They were married, and for a time they seemed happy. Mr. Hastings' manner to her was kind, and she was more devoted to him than ever.

"Six months after their marriage I came to stay at Hazell Court. Your mother and I were delighted to be together again, and three weeks passed away most pleasantly. I noticed that Mr. Hastings was frequently absent from home, but as Lady Constance never remarked upon it I appeared not to be aware of it. One day she had been very unwell, and in the evening I persuaded her to take a stroll with me in the grounds. The air seemed to revive her, and we walked further than usual up toward the woods.

"'Hush,' she said, suddenly, 'surely that was St. George's voice?'

"We listened for a moment, and then I tried to drag her away.

"'Be quiet,' she whispered, in a harsh, unnatural voice; I *will* hear.'

"It was almost dark, so that we could see from behind the bushes without being noticed. Your father was bending over the gate that led into the woods, and a very beautiful girl was standing before him, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"'My darling,' I heard your father say, 'is it not enough that you have the whole of my love?—that, waking or

sleeping, you command the entire passion of my heart? Lady Constance is good and gentle, but I feel no more for her than I should for a sister; every pulse of my being vibrates for you. Do I not spend more than half my time with you?—is there any wish of yours I would not gratify? Would to God, my darling, I might have married you; but you knew from the first that I dare not break through a vow which had been kept in our family for centuries, cost what it might.’

“‘And shall my child, when it is born, have no name, and hers be the heir?’ cried the girl, passionately.

“‘I heard no more. Lady Constance turned white as death, and before I could help her, she fell fainting on the grass. I was terribly alarmed, shrieked for help, and your father turned in quick surprise. I can remember to this day the stern, defiant expression of his face, as he came to raise her.

“‘How long have you been here?’ he asked, looking haughtily at me.

“‘She has heard all,’ I answered, trembling with indignation, and without another word he took her in his arms, and carried her to the house. She never recovered the shock to her dying day, and he never forgave her for having listened. That is the story of your mother’s sadness, Mr. Hastings.”

A silence of some minutes ensued.

“Lady Grace,” said Errol, presently, “what became of —of the child?”

“The mother and child both died when it was born. But,” said Lady Grace, suddenly altering her tones, “I have really kept you from your letters an unconscionable time, and I have not yet preferred my request. It relates in a measure to the other friend of whom I told you, poor Winifred Champion.”

“Champion?” said Hastings, interrogatively.

“Yes, the daughter of old Sir Howard.”

“I did not know that there was another daughter than Lady Valanton.”

“Yes, but she made a *mésalliance*, and Sir Howard, who is a dreadful tyrant, has never allowed her name to be mentioned since. I was very fond of her, poor girl, although she was some years younger than I was, but I never saw her after she ran away, for I was abroad with my hus-

band, and before I returned to England she died. Her governess, Madame de Montolieu, was a very good and charming person, and I have always kept up a correspondence with her from time to time. I invaded your retreat this afternoon on purpose to ask if I may have the pony-carriage, in order to drive over and pay the old lady a visit."

"Why not take the barouche, Lady Grace? Lady St. Ego and Lady Marion have declined driving this afternoon, and the young ladies intend to ride over to Mrs. Champion's before dinner."

"Thank you, I would rather not disconcert my old friend by too much state; besides, I have a great fancy to drive your pretty ponies."

"By all means, then," exclaimed Errol, ringing the bell, as Lady Grace rose to go.

Lady Grace Farquhar arrived very quickly at the little cottage, and prepared for a long chat with Mme. de Montolieu, who was very glad to see her.

"I heard," she said, "that you had arrived at the Court, but I scarcely ventured to expect you until after the festivities were concluded."

"I should have come over long ago," Lady Grace answered gayly, "but I am doing duty at the Court as hostess. You see, dear madame, I am getting so old that it seems quite natural for me to be acting as Mr. Hastings' mother."

"This Mr. Hastings," asked Mme de Montolieu, "do you like him?"

"I think him charming. He is so agreeable, and clever, and well-bred."

"But is he good, and honest, and true?"

Lady Grace looked a little surprised at this question, the more so as it was put with an unusual degree of earnestness.

"I cannot tell, but I should think so," she replied. "It seems to me as if his greatest failing was the hereditary Hastings pride. Why do you ask?"

"I remember his mother," remarked Mme. de Montolieu, checking herself. "She was very good and amiable."

"She was indeed!" sighed Lady Grace. "I have been going to ask you, in so many of my letters, what has become of poor Winifred's child. She was a bright-looking, intelligent little girl."

"How old was she when you last saw her?" inquired Mme. de Montolieu.

"Eleven. You know I have only been to England, for any time, once since then, and when I last came to see you she was away."

"Ah! Lady Grace," said the old French lady, sighing, "she gives me the keenest anxiety."

"How so? Is she not turning out well?"

"Too well, too well," ejaculated Mme. de Montolieu, with an expressive shake of the head. "She is all the fondest mother or friend could wish; beautiful, amiable, graceful and accomplished—a child to be proud of. Ah, dear Lady Grace, I fear greatly that I have taught her too much, she is so far beyond her father's station; but indeed I did it all for the best. I hoped Sir Howard would have noticed and brought her out, but he sternly refuses to have anything to do with her; and they are all so cruel and disdainful to the poor child, it breaks my heart."

"It is just like that detestable old Sir Howard," cried Lady Grace, with unusual energy. "He always insisted on sacrificing everything to his stubborn pride. Can nothing be done?"

"I fear not," replied the old lady; and then she proceeded to tell her friend of Miss Champion's treatment of her cousin.

Lady Grace was highly indignant.

"I can quite believe it," she remarked. "Miss Champion has an air of haughty superciliousness that offends me greatly. I can not understand how it is that Mr. Hastings seems to admire her so much."

At this moment the door opened, and Winifred entered. She drew back on seeing a stranger.

"Enter, my love," said Mme. de Montolieu. "This is Winifred Eyre," she added, addressing her visitor.

Lady Grace was fairly astonished at the sight of such a graceful elegant creature.

"Come here, my dear," she said gently, "and let me see if you are like your mother."

Lady Grace left the cottage that afternoon perfectly charmed with Winifred. "I will see if something can not be done to bring her into a position for which she is fitted," she thought, as she drove slowly back to the court. "Ah,

if I could only have had such a daughter!" and poor, childless Lady Grace sighed heavily.

CHAPTER IX.

"HE LOVES ME—HE LOVES ME NOT."

WINIFRED had just left the Farm on her way to the cottage, when she met and was accosted by Hawkins the gamekeeper.

"I beg your pardon, miss, for making so free," he said, taking off his cap respectfully, "but I thought may be you'd like to see some of the grand doings up at the Court to-morrow."

Winifred colored painfully, and Hawkins, remarking it, was terribly concerned.

"I'm sure, I meant no offense—I hope you won't take what I said as a liberty." The man looked anxiously at her.

"Indeed, no," exclaimed Winifred, recovering herself; "I am much obliged to you for thinking of me, Hawkins."

"You see, miss," said the gamekeeper, eagerly, "it was in this way: I said to myself, why, the doings at the Court to-morrow will be quite a sight; there's the ball-room done up in that there beautiful way as 'ud be a show in itself, let alone all the county fam'lies coming from miles round. They tell me as how the master would make everybody promise to be there by half-past nine, so thinks I, if Miss Eyre 'ill just step round about ten o'clock, I could let her into the little garden that the ball-room looks into, and she could see all the gay doings without a soul being the wiser."

"Thank you, Hawkins," said Winifred, gently; "it was very good of you to think of me."

"Well, miss," concluded Hawkins, somewhat doubtful whether her manner was intended to convey acceptance or rejection of his proposal, "anyhow, I shall be there to let you in if so be you like to come; and I'll warrant you sha'n't meet with no one by the way. Good-day, miss," and he put on his cap and walked off.

As Winifred went on her way, she was terribly hurt at a proposal so injurious to her dignity; but it was impossible for her to feel any annoyance with the man, who had evi-

dently spoken from sheer good-will, and the wish to afford her a pleasure. But the idea of her, Winifred Eyre, going to look in surreptitiously at a window to see the upper classes amusing themselves, was a dreadful offense to her pride.

But it frequently happens that when we violently repudiate an idea at first, we are all the more likely to come round to it afterward. And as Winifred walked along, insidious thoughts crept in, to undermine the stronghold of her determination.

"After all," whispered Curiosity, "why should I feel so bitter at the thought of being only a spectator of this grandeur? I shall never be able to participate in it, and why should I refuse an opportunity I have so often coveted, of seeing a really grand ball?"

Then she fell into a train of thought: "If I had only the advantages of being Sir Howard's granddaughter, that Flora Champion has—if I could have met Mr. Hastings in society, and ridden and danced with him as she has done, I think I could have made him love me; but as a farmer's daughter, what chance have I with an admired aristocratic beauty! I wonder if he knows we are cousins. Of course she would not tell him; but every one hereabouts is aware of it, and if he ever had the curiosity to ask about me, some one must have told him. He knew my name and where I lived—of course he must know the rest. I should like to see him in society; I can fancy how courtly and handsome he would look, playing host to all the great people. I wonder whether he will pay marked attention to Miss Champion to-morrow night. Perhaps—perhaps he will ask her to marry him; and then—I hope I shall never see them again—and I hope I may die—I hope—" But here words failed her, and she sat down on the bank in the lonely woods, and the tears streamed down her face. So intent was she on her misery, that she did not hear footsteps approaching her, and when a man's voice sounded tenderly on her ears, saying, "Miss Eyre, are you in trouble?" she started, blushing, to her feet.

"Mr. Hastings!" she exclaimed, covered with confusion and crimson shame; but somehow the sight of his handsome face banished the memory of her sadness, and a bright smile came into her eyes. Of course, after his neglectful treatment, she ought to have behaved to him with great

coldness and dignity; but men and women in love are unreasonable beings.

"I am so glad to see you smile again," Errol said, with the tenderest inflection of his voice; "I could not bear to see you in distress."

"When people have not very much to occupy their minds," Winifred answered, smiling, "they are rather subject to fits of depression, without adequate cause."

"But you ought never to be sad," Errol said.

"Why not?" asked Winifred, brightly. "What right have I to be exempt from the common lot of mortals?"

"The gods ought to love you so much that they should keep misfortune away from you."

"But," said Winifred, "are we not told that it is no sign of favor when everything goes smoothly with us? You have forgotten the story of Polycrates. My own belief is that the greatest happiness lies in perpetual occupation, be it pleasant or otherwise. I envy you almost now—you are so busied in entertaining and amusing people, you have no time for regrets."

"No time for regrets!" echoed Mr. Hastings; "for the last three weeks my life has been one unceasing, haunting regret."

Winifred looked up into his face inquiringly.

"It is a trouble I can not ask any one to share—you least of all," he said, after a pause.

Winifred's eyes dropped beneath his gaze—it was so sad, yet so eager.

A voice was heard calling, "Hastings, Hastings!"

In an instant he had taken her hand, kissed it passionately, and was gone. Winifred turned away quickly, and went on her way to the cottage. She was trembling, confused, glad, surprised. She scarcely knew what her real feelings were. But as Hawkins' proposal recurred to her mind, she determined to accept it.

"I shall see them together," she thought, "and then I shall know whether he is true or false. If he did not love me, he could not have spoken to me as he did just now. What could he have meant by his constant regret?—a regret that has haunted him these past three weeks? It is just that time since I met him first in the wood. But why regret?" And then a sudden thought made her sick with

terror. "Perhaps he is already engaged to Miss Champion. I did not think of that."

And with alternating hopes and fears she arrived at the cottage, and found Lady Grace, as has been described. When she had accompanied her to the pony-carriage, and returned to the little drawing-room, she exclaimed:

"Madame, who is that kind, noble-looking lady?"

"She is Lady Grace Farquhar, a very amiable, charming woman; she was a dear friend of your poor mamma's, my child."

"Do tell me all about her, dear madame," Winifred exclaimed, eagerly. "I never even heard you speak of her. Was she unkind to poor mamma, too, when she married papa?"

"No, love, but she had married a short time before, and gone abroad with her husband, who was in delicate health, and she did not return to England until after you were born. She came to visit me on her arrival, and insisted on seeing you. For years she used to send you toys and playthings; but then she went traveling in the Holy Land, and for a long time I heard nothing of her. The next time she came you were eleven years old, but you only saw her for a few minutes, so that I dare say your memory retained no impression of her; and the last time was two months ago, when you were away in London. She was asking about you when you came in."

"And will she go abroad again?"

"No, I think not. Sir Clayton seems to have made up his mind to live at Endon Vale for the future."

"Endon Vale!" exclaimed Winifred; "that is not very far from here, surely—"

"Fifteen miles, I believe, dear. She has promised to drive over sometimes and see me when she is there."

"I hope I shall see her sometimes too," Winifred said.

"She is so kind and gentle, I feel as if I could almost love her. Madame, has she any sons and daughters?"

"No, my love, she is childless, and she says that is her only trouble. But I know she has always had great anxiety for her husband—he is consumptive. She told me to-day, though, that he is stronger now than he has ever been, and that the physicians have pronounced him able to endure the English climate through the ensuing winter. I hope

it will be so, for I greatly love to see Lady Grace at times, and talk with her about the past."

"Madame," said Winifred suddenly, "I want you to grant me one favor."

"I hope it is one that lies in my power, dear child; for then you may be sure of my ready consent."

"Oh, it is quite in your power; but still I have my misgivings."

"Tell me, my love, and I will answer you."

"Dear madame," cried Winifred, kneeling beside her old friend, and half hiding her face, "I do not know how to tell you."

Mme. de Montolieu stroked her favorite's head encouragingly.

"I want you to take me to the Court to-morrow night."

"The Court!" exclaimed Mme. de Montolieu, in overwhelming surprise; "has Mr. Hastings, then, invited you to his ball?"

"Oh, no, not that," Winifred answered, quickly, with a deep blush.

She paused, and Mme. de Montolieu waited until she recovered herself.

"How then, my love?" she uttered gently.

Winifred brought out the next words with a choking sensation in her throat:

"To-night, as I was coming here, Hawkins met me, and he asked me if I should like to see the ball. He said he would let me into the little garden under the ball-room, and there would be no one else there. At first I was angry at the idea, but I have changed my mind; and, oh, madame," she concluded, earnestly, "I do so want to go!"

Mme. de Montolieu looked at her with irrepressible astonishment. She almost failed to believe her senses when proud Winifred Eyre made such a request.

"I know it must seem strange to you," Winifred said, imploringly; "you think I am forgetting my pride, and my self-esteem; but I have a reason—indeed I have."

"Winifred!" cried Mme. de Montolieu, in a pained voice, "you are thinking too much of this Mr. Hastings. Be warned in time; he does not think of you."

Winifred hid her face in her hands.

"Why do you say that?" she asked in a low tone.

"Because Lady Grace told me only this afternoon how he admires your cousin."

"I will not believe it! I want the evidence of my own eyes!" cried Winifred, passionately. "If he cares for her, and not for me, he is false—false—false!"

Then it *was* true, Mme. de Montolieu thought her worst fears were realized; and this girl, whom she had brought up so tenderly, and shielded from every care, was breaking her heart about a man who was only trifling with her.

She caressed the head that lay in her lap so pitifully and tenderly while she said:

"My child, do not deceive yourself. You are unused to the ways of society, and you have put a false construction on Mr. Hastings' words, which a girl used to the courteous flatteries of a man of the world would appreciate at their true value. Let me warn you in time, before your peace of mind is destroyed. My child, it wounds me to speak thus to you, but he is too proud to make a farmer's daughter his wife. Men are heartless; it is very pleasant to them to win a young girl's love; and, when they tire of it, they go away and forget that their amusement has blighted a life, and brought sorrow to a heart where it had been a stranger."

"*I am not—I can not be deceived!*" Winifred exclaimed, vehemently. "Let it be proved to me, at all events, let me see them together, and then, if my senses convince me that your words are true, I will never see or think of him again."

There was silence for some minutes. Mme. de Montolieu was reflecting.

"I can not bear the idea of my child humbling her pride in this way," she thought. "She would never forgive herself if any one should see and recognize her. For myself, I do not mind; a walk at night will not hurt me, accustomed as I am to pacing after dark in my garden, and I have no pride to be hurt. Perhaps it will, after all, be the means of curing her of a foolish fancy. She will assuredly see something that will cause her jealous pain, and then she may resolve not to think any more of him."

"Winifred," she said aloud, "I will go with you if you wish it."

"I do wish it; thank you a thousand times!"

And Winifred kissed the hand she held affectionately.

The next evening, shortly before ten o'clock, Winifred and her companion, cloaked and veiled, appeared at the little garden-gate. The faithful Hawkins was waiting for them, and, true to his promise, not another person was to be seen. He had placed two chairs for them behind a clump of laurels, and as the ball-room windows were down to the ground, they could see plainly everything that took place. It was the first time that Winifred had seen an evening gathering of people from the gay world, and it seemed to her like a glimpse of fairyland. She did not feel envious or bitter at her own exclusion from it, but she looked on with glad, eager surprise. Even to an initiated eye the ball-room must have appeared remarkably elegant and tasteful; it seemed to Winifred almost supernatural. The walls were almost entirely composed of plate-glass, set in the lightest and most delicate gold scroll-work. Innumerable crystal branches, holding wax lights, and golden brackets, supporting large cut-crystal vases, filled with scarlet geraniums and ferns, filled up the intermediate space. Three magnificent crystal chandeliers hung from the ceiling, and made the night into bright daylight. But what seemed to Winifred the most wonderful, was a complete fernery at the further end of the room, composed of rock-work, hidden by every species of fern, and dripping with cool, splashing water. Above this was a screen of magnificent and rare flowers, reaching to the very roof, the colors of which were blended with such harmony and taste that it seemed a marvel of beauty. And grouped all around, in laughing animation, were stately dowagers, elegant girls, and handsome men. The toilets were of the most *recherché* order, and there was a perfect blaze of diamonds, for every one had chosen to do honor to their handsome host.

Winifred saw Lady Grace Farquhar, robed in delicate satin and lace, standing with other ladies on a kind of a velvet dais, receiving the guests as they entered with stately graciousness. Then she saw something that made her remble and turn pale. Mr. Hastings entered the room, looking more handsome and courtly than she had ever imagined, and on his arm leaned Flora Champion, with the proud dignity of an empress. She was dressed in a floating maze of tulle, that seemed almost ethereal; in her hair she wore a wreath of green grasses, moss, and tiny

ferns, with here and there a diamond in imitation of dew-drops. A necklace of emeralds, pearls, and diamonds encircled her beautiful columned throat, and in her hand was a bouquet of rare white flowers, interspersed with ferns. A murmur of admiration went round the room as she entered, so queenly and magnificent she looked. A jealous pang shot through Winifred's heart at the sight, and when she saw Hastings bend down to her, and perceived the smile that was reflected back in his eyes, she clinched her teeth over her lips to keep back the tears of mortification.

But there was a momentary relief. Mr. Hastings left Miss Champion at Lady Grace Farquhar's side, and went away. Presently sweet sounds of unseen music rose on her ear, and it was evident that the dancing was about to commence. Couples were quickly forming, and Winifred waited in breathless expectation to see with whom Mr. Hastings would open the ball. It would surely not be her cousin—that would be too marked, unless there was in earnest something between them; there must be many in the room who had prior claims to his courtesy than Miss Champion. Every set was formed, and they seemed to be waiting in expectation for Mr. Hastings. Winifred held her breath while he entered, as Cœnone might have done when, unseen, she waited in quivering doubt the decision of Paris. He walked straight up to the dais, and then he led triumphant, queenly Flora Champion to the upper end of the room. She saw him bending low and speaking softly to her; she noted the thrilling gaze with which his look was returned, and she turned to Madame de Montolieu, and said, in quick, gasping tones, "It is enough—let us go!"

CHAPTER X.

AN UNFULFILLED INTENTION.

THE ball was pronounced a great success. Every one declared it was the pleasantest of the year, although, as far as two of the fair guests were concerned, we are compelled to be a little doubtful. Lady Ulrica St. Ego was intensely mortified that Mr. Hastings had not thought proper to open the ball with her. He had paid marked attention to Miss Champion, and had danced twice with her; while he

had not devoted more than one dance to any other of his fair visitors. Lady Agneta was equally annoyed, for neither had Lord Harold Erskine paid her the devotion she expected; indeed, he seemed greatly *épris* with Flora Champion, who was undoubtedly the belle of the evening.

Every one was high in praise of Errol Hastings—of his distinguished appearance, his courtesy, his taste, and everything that belonged to him. It was impossible not to admire his splendid mansion and its costly arrangements, and many a titled dowager there would have been proud to see her daughter mistress of Hazell Court. The banqueting hall was magnificent; its immense proportions were revealed by a blaze of light. The massive black oaken side-board groaned beneath its weight of gold and silver plate, costly fruit and flowers in wonderfully cut crystal ornaments, flashing with prismatic light, stretched along the immense table from end to end; while at the top and bottom, on golden salvers, were immense pyramids of ice, surrounded by wreaths of fern, the effect of which was pronounced magical. Every luxury in season and out of season was there—nothing was left to desire. The portrait and picture galleries were thrown open, and lighted, so as to show every picture, and yet to afford a rest to the eyes after the dazzling brilliancy of the other rooms. There were cards in the sitting-rooms, and wonderful portfolios of photographs of all the celebrated pictures, and great velvet cases, containing ivory miniatures of divers well-known and beautiful women of ancient and modern times.

Leading from the ball-room were three small rooms opening into each other. Two were hung with amber satin and brilliantly lighted; the third was fitted up with the most delicate rose-color, and contained various objects of *vertu*. Everything in it was refined and elegant—there were charming little cabinet pictures, and statuettes in marble, ivory, and silver; there were the most elegant designs in ormolu, and books of fabulous bindings. The room was only half lighted, and looked mysteriously beautiful in its shaded twilight. Beyond that again was a conservatory—a long, lofty glass-house, in which grew broad-leaved tropical plants and magnificent crimson flowering cactuses. A cool, plashing fountain was in the center; and beside its marble basin stood Errol and Flora Champion. For the last few days he had determined that the night of the ball should

decide his fate—he would ask Miss Champion to be his wife; and sweet, winning Winifred Eyre should haunt his thoughts no more.

But since the previous day he had become strangely wavering and irresolute. He could not forget the streaming tears and the quivering sorrow of the tender mouth; nor yet the bright, glad smile which had lighted up those sweet, brown eyes when he had spoken to her. Did it mean she loved him?—and was not her love more precious than the cold, self-seeking passion of a well-born beauty like Miss Champion? He had endeavored to banish the thought of Winifred, to crush down his feeling, and to force himself into loving her rival; and to make the backward barrier impassable, he had opened the ball with Flora that very night. And now that he had brought her here to say those very words he had repeated to himself a thousand times, his whole heart and soul revolted, and he could not force the utterance to his reluctant lips.

They stood alone together in the soft, dim light—the sweet sound of falling water making a cadence in their ears, and the broad palm-leaves branching overhead. And Errol was thinking:

“If the woman I loved stood by me here, with her tender, trusting eyes looking up into my face, and I could say in all honor and truth to her, ‘I love you,’ I would give half of everything I have in the world.”

All this time Miss Champion was standing silent, and looking into the water beneath.

“Why does he not speak?” she thought; “he can have but one intention in bringing me here,” and Errol read her thoughts.

Miss Champion at last broke the silence, which was becoming awkward.

“How beautiful palm-trees must look growing wild in their native countries! You have seen them, Mr. Hastings?”

“Yes—many a time,” Errol answered, and as a sudden thought flashed across him, he added, “and shall probably do so again before long.”

Flora was startled out of her usual well-bred composure.

“You surely do not think of leaving England?” she exclaimed.

“I suppose my constant travels have made me restless,”

Errol said, half confused. "I feel unable to settle down in one place for any length of time."

"I had hoped," Miss Champion said, softly, looking up into his face with her blue eyes—"I had hoped we were always to have you near us now. Surely you can not have tired already of this lovely place?—it seems enough to make any reasonable being happy only to live here. Have your friends wearied you so soon?"

"No, indeed," Errol answered, "it is the regret at leaving them that has kept me so long from my purpose."

He was rushing blindly now into all manner of inextricable falsehoods, and having adopted a sudden and totally unconsidered course of action, he was feeling the awkwardness consequent thereupon.

"Then you *really* mean to leave us?" Flora said, in a pleading voice, most unusual to her. She felt it was a last chance.

"It will not be for long," he answered, looking down at her, and speaking in a low voice; "you will not quite forget me while I am gone, Miss Champion?"

"I shall never forget the happiness of the last few weeks," she answered, looking down.

It was her last card, and she played it well, but in vain.

"Then I shall have one consoling thought to take me on my journey." And he gave her his arm.

Then they went silently back to the ball-room, and the feelings of both were sufficiently unenviable. Errol felt he had not behaved well, and his pride chafed at the thought; and Miss Champion was disappointed, mortified, and perplexed. But there was no trace of the inward struggle on her fair face as she entered the room; even her mother, who was watching her keenly, could detect nothing from its expression. But it seemed to augur very unfavorably for her designs, that Flora accepted the marked attentions of Lord Harold Erskine with so much favor, and that not even a word or look passed between her and Mr. Hastings during the rest of the evening.

As the mother and daughter were parting for the night, the former whispered:

"Have you anything to tell me, Flora?"

And Miss Champion answered coldly:

"Nothing! Good-night, mamma."

The following morning Sir Howard and his daughter-in-

law sat alone over a late breakfast. Reginald was away at the Court, Flora was breakfasting in her room, and Mr. Champion was gone to London.

"Well, Margaret," said Sir Howard, "did young Hastings propose to Flora last night, as you expected?"

"No!" said Mrs. Champion, shortly, rather mortified at the answer she was compelled to give.

"No?" echoed her questioner, looking up, and pausing in the act of transferring the butter to his plate. "No?" he repeated.

"My dear Sir Howard, I said no."

"Then what the devil does the man mean by opening the ball with her, and paying her such marked attention? I call it a piece of damned impertinence!"

"Pray, Sir Howard," said Mrs. Champion, greatly nettled, "be a little more considerate in your remarks. Mr. Hastings' conduct in opening the ball with Flora can not be construed into anything but a marked compliment."

"A damned deal too marked," said the angry old gentleman, who was anything but circumspect in his speech when he was annoyed. "Either Flora has played her cards very badly, or you have given me to understand there was a great deal more between them than there really was. Do you mean to tell me he said nothing that can be construed into an intention?"

"Really, Sir Howard," replied his daughter-in-law, "if you want to know the particulars, you must go to Flora. I can get nothing out of her."

"I tell you what, Margaret, if you don't mind, you'll have that girl on your hands altogether. It's high time she was married, or engaged, or something—you seem to forget that she will be twenty next month. She has been out two seasons, and has had every advantage that rank and wealth can procure for her, and at the end of it all she is not one whit nearer being established. It's a pity she was so sure of young Hastings, and snubbed Lord Henchley as she did."

"Lord Henchley was a *parvenu*, and had neither brains nor money."

"It would be a great deal better to be Lady Henchley than a neglected old maid."

"Really, Sir Howard, you are too absurd!" exclaimed Mrs. Champion, angrily; "any one would think Flora was

thirty, instead of twenty, and that her admirers were beginning to decrease. Allow me to tell you she was the acknowledged belle of the room last night, and that Lord Harold Erskine paid her the most particular attention."

"Bah!" said Sir Howard, "he's a puppy. Hastings is worth a dozen of him."

"But I think Flora inclines to a title."

"A title!—bah!" exclaimed Sir Howard again; "a woman need want no prouder title than a Hastings could give her. I would ten thousand times rather see her plain Mrs. Hastings, of Hazell Court, than a duchess of a mushroom creation."

"It appears that Mr. Hastings is too much occupied with his flirtation with your other granddaughter to have serious intentions to Flora," Mrs. Champion remarked. She wondered afterward at her own temerity; it was the first time in her life she had ever ventured to mention Winifred Champion's daughter to Sir Howard.

"My other granddaughter?" he said, looking up. "I was not aware that he knew Laura or Ada Fordyce—which of them do you mean?"

"Neither," replied Mrs. Champion, coldly.

"Then who the devil do you mean?" exclaimed Sir Howard, testily.

"I mean Winifred Eyre."

Sir Howard's brow grew black as night.

"What do you mean?" he cried, furiously; "and how dare you mention that name in my presence?"

Mrs. Champion was, as a rule, rather afraid of her father-in-law; but she had been so incensed this morning at his attack on Flora, that she only felt anxious to retaliate on him, and was thoroughly indifferent to his wrath.

"I mean this," she replied, in cold, stinging tones; "your granddaughter, Winifred Eyre, has been seen constantly with Mr. Hastings, and he has amused himself by making love to her. Whether his intentions are serious or honorable, time will show."

Sir Howard rose to his feet with a terrible blasphemy.

"If," cried he, "he dares to mean anything dishonorable to one who, though I disown her, yet claims to be descended from me, I will brand him before the world—I will hound him from society. I will—"

But here words failed him, and he sunk back in his chair

in a paroxysm of impotent wrath. Mrs. Champion was very much surprised at the course matters were taking. She had spoken with the amiable intention of provoking her father-in-law, but she had never imagined for a moment that anything would induce him to take part with his despised, neglected granddaughter. She rose presently and left the room, and Sir Howard did not attempt to detain her.

Meantime poor Winifred was very sad and miserable. She could not rally from the shock of Errol's falseness; his deception seemed so cruel.

Why should he have amused himself by trying to win the affections of a simple country girl, who was completely at his mercy? She had no safeguard against his fascinations as her high-born rival had. "Is it possible," she thought, "that his love was only simulated, and that he could be so mean and false as to snare me into loving him by pretending an equal, or even greater passion for me? Can it be true of him, as of those men Madame de Montolieu spoke of, who have no compunction in breaking a woman's heart to gratify their vanity, or pass their idle hours? And yet I feel as if I could scarcely condemn him—I only hate her. How is it that women are so forgiving to the men who injure them. Even poor, sorrowful, heart-broken CEnone forgave Paris when he came back to lay his head on her faithful breast before he died.

Two days passed, and Mme. de Montolieu had seen nothing of Winifred; a most unusual occurrence. She began to be sorely anxious for her dear child, and on the evening of the second day she put on her cloak and hood, and went over to the Farm. She found Winifred sitting, book in hand, under her favorite beeches, but her eyes wandered dreamily over the landscape, and she was so absorbed in thought as not to see Mme. de Montolieu until she came close up to her.

"My child, how is it that you have deserted me?"

Winifred raised her eyes, and her old friend saw that she had been weeping bitterly.

"Dear madame, forgive me; I have been too miserable."

"Poor child!" said the old lady gently, stroking Winifred's head with her usual favorite gesture; "poor child!"

"Oh, madame," cried Winifred, passionately, throwing

herself on the ground at Mme. de Montolieu's feet, "why does God let people be so miserable?"

"My child," repeated her friend, gently, "that is a question we can none of us answer. There is a wise purpose, we may be sure, that allows affliction, since affliction is sent, and we must bear it as best we may. Sorrow is very bitter to the young, but when they have learned what only time and experience can teach them, resignation, they wonder how their first small trials can have seemed so grievous to them, and are thankful for that blessing which is always left us—hope."

"I have no hope!" cried Winifred, bitterly.

"We all have it," said Mme. de Montolieu, gently. "It is the last thing that deserts us. Ah! my child, it would be sad, indeed, if hope had not been left at the bottom of this Pandora's box of ours. Without it we should not care to live, or work, or eat, but should wander about miserably, waiting for death to relieve us of a burden too heavy to bear. But it takes many a long year to find out what is really happiness. One must have outlived the bright anticipations of youth, which can but end in disappointment; one must have passed through the bitter mistrust of good in this world that follows it, and see only a malicious dispensation, bent on thwarting every human wish; and one must have attained that blessed belief in the love and care of a Heavenly Father, which alone can smooth the stormy sea of our troubled lives. Resignation, my child, is the truest happiness; a blind faith in an all-wise Providence the truest wisdom. If, remembering the experience of our own sorrows, we can do something to make the life of one of our fellow-creatures happier, we shall not have lived in vain."

"Madame," said Winifred, looking up with tears in her eyes, "did you ever have a trouble like mine?"

"My child," answered Mme. de Montolieu, in a sad, gentle voice, "in my young days I had a sorrow, such as I pray God in his mercy may be pleased to spare you."

And she bent down and kissed Winifred tenderly.

CHAPTER XL

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

It is a grand trait in human character, when a man or woman who has not as yet outlived their youth, can appreciate and act on the belief that there is something nobler in life than passion—something better than the gratification of self. A man or woman who can yield their heart's desire to the happiness of another must be governed by attributes of the godlike and divine. Mme. de Montolieu's whole life had been saddened by such a sacrifice, but she had never repented her renunciation of self.

"Surely," she said, at times, when her troubles seemed most grievous—"surely it is better to suffer with the consciousness of having acted rightly than to gratify one's own desire at the expense of others' happiness."

When Marie Antoinette de Montolieu went to live with Lord and Lady Vaynham, after her mother's death, Lady Vaynham had good cause for disquietude as to the result of bringing her into immediate contact with her grown-up sons.

She was not beautiful, but she had a sparkling vivacity which stood well in place of it. A prepossessing manner, a ready wit, a singular grace, and the sweetest of voices, formed a whole very dangerous to a mother's peace of mind.

Lord Vaynham vowed there was no one like her, and his wife could not resist her sweet, gracious influence, but was forced into loving her. The Hon. George Vaynham, her eldest son, was absent on a diplomatic mission, and was, besides, half engaged to an heiress, who had fallen desperately in love with his handsome face the previous season, so Lady Vaynham had no serious apprehensions in that quarter. The two younger ones fell in love with Marie at once, and were excessively jealous of the least preference she showed for either. But their mother soon perceived there was no danger of the passion being returned, for Marie treated them both with a kind, sisterly courtesy, very far removed from a warmer feeling.

To her friends, as she always called Lord and Lady Vaynham, she was so attentive, so thoughtful and affectionately

considerate, that they began after a time to feel toward her as a daughter. She read, and played, and sung to Lord Vaynham, for hours together, without the least appearance of weariness; and she wrote Lady Vaynham's letters, entertained her guests, and was always at hand to assist her in any difficulty, either by suggestion or action. Her mother had been dead more than a year, and Lady Vaynham resolved to introduce Mlle. de Montolieu the following season. Her position as the daughter of a French nobleman justified it; and, besides, her ladyship was anxious to please a *protégée* who was so thoughtful and affectionate to her.

Marie was presented at court, and went thoroughly into society, where she made a complete success. Her vivacity and brilliant wit were a contrast to the quiet, somewhat prudish manner of the young English girls of the day; and she received an amount of attention that was flattering to herself and gratifying to her *chaperone*. Amongst others, the Marquis of Poyns paid her considerable attention, and she was by no means averse to his society. Frank, kind-hearted, and a finished gentleman, he was a man well calculated to win a woman's esteem and affection; and being possessed of considerable wealth, Lord and Lady Vaynham were pleased to see him frequently at their house, and delighted at the idea of his becoming a suitor for their charming *protégée*.

George Vaynham had been expected home for the last two months, but delay upon delay occurred, and he was still absent. One afternoon Marie was sitting alone in the drawing-room, sorting wools for a very complicated piece of worsted work that Lady Vaynham was about to undertake, when the door was suddenly burst open, and a very handsome young man, bronzed by travel, entered the room. He looked hastily round, but not seeing the person he was in quest of, turned to Marie, and said:

"They told me I should find my mother here."

Mlle. de Montolieu rose and not being particularly pleased by the tone or manner of the new-comer, said, haughtily:

"Lady Vaynham is in her room, I believe?"

"You are Marie de Montolieu?" he remarked, interrogatively, and somewhat aggressively.

"My name is Montolieu," she replied, coloring, with indignation at the familiarity.

"Will you let my mother know I am here?"

"Monsieur," said Marie, with an elevation of the eyebrows, expressive of extreme surprise and hauteur, "if you ring the bell, doubtless a servant will send the *femme de chambre*, who will obey your behest."

Mr. Vaynham looked at her for a moment, and then left the room, soliloquizing as he went:

"Proud as the very deuce—like all these humbugging French refugees."

When the Hon. George Vaynham first heard of his father's intention of adopting the homeless orphan French girl, he set it down as a piece of harmless Quixotism; but when he was told that Lady Vaynham actually contemplated introducing her into society, he lost all patience.

"Well!" he remarked, "of all the damned pieces of tomfoolery I have ever heard, this is about the biggest! She'll be making love to Frank or Edgar, and then my mother won't be so well pleased at her benevolence. As if the family were not going to the deuce fast enough without inventing new extravagances to help it!"

From which speech the gentle reader may imagine that the Hon. George Vaynham was ill-natured and ungenerous; but then he would be mistaken. He was a very charming young fellow, and a great favorite—only, like most of us, a little selfish.

When he left the room Marie resumed her seat, considerably nettled at the brusqueness of his demeanor toward her.

"What an odious manner!" she thought. "I know I shall detest him. How different he is from Frank or Edgar! And so this is the paragon of whose manner and style I have heard so much? He is handsome, certainly, but his address is not to be compared with that of Lord Poyns. I like Lord Poyns. Lady Vaynham says he likes me, too, and I do not think she is altogether mistaken. Madame la Marquise de Poyns, the Marchioness of Poyns—it does not sound so bad. He is very good—he has the true *air noble*, perhaps not very clever or *spirituel*, but still a man to be proud of. I wonder if Vaynham thought me ungracious. I should not like to have been that, for his dear, kind mother's sake. But I could not help feeling indignant—he was so odiously brusque. Fancy his asking me to announce his arrival, as if he were a prince of the blood, and

I his very humble servant! *Merci beaucoup, monsieur!* but you must do your own bidding, unless you think it fit to alter that tone of command very considerably, in addressing the daughter of one of the proudest noblemen in France."

And so it may be seen that Marie de Montolieu was by no means deficient in pride or a sense of her own importance.

"Mother!" exclaimed George Vaynham, after the first affectionate greetings were over, "I don't like that girl at all."

"What girl, George, dear?"

"That French girl, your companion, or *protégée*, or whatever you like to call her."

"My dear boy, you are surely premature—why, you have not been in the house five minutes, and how can you tell whether you like her or not?"

"My first impressions are generally correct, and I am sure I shall not like her. She's as disdainful as an empress."

"I never saw her so," returned Lady Vaynham, in surprise; "you must have done something to annoy her. She is a very sweet-tempered, affectionate girl, and has been like a daughter to your father and myself."

"I shouldn't be surprised if you have her for a daughter in reality; the last letter I had from Frank was full of her; he could think of nothing else."

"Of course I would not have one of them marry her on any account; but there is not the least fear of that. She is very kind and sisterly to the boys, but it is scarcely probable she would think seriously of *them*, when a word would bring Lord Poyns to her feet."

"Poyns! By Jove, mother! you don't mean to say *he* has any serious thought of her?"

"I feel perfectly certain," replied Lady Vaynham, "that Lord Poyns is passionately attached to Marie, and that she has only to give him a little more encouragement to wear a coronet."

"I always thought he was an ass," ejaculated George Vaynham.

"Come, come, George, I will not hear any more against my adopted daughter; at all events, until you have a better opportunity of judging. Now tell me all about yourself. Have you made up your mind to marry Lucy Cathcart?"

"I think so, mother: I am sick of diplomacy. I am in

debt; and my father seems scarcely in a position to help me. I can not pretend to any great passion for her, but she seems good-tempered and ladylike, and I know she has seventeen thousand a year."

"Those mortgages vex me so terribly, George. If they could be paid off, the property would be a very good one; but there seems no hope of that in my time and your father's. We are spending a good deal more than our income now, and I do not see any probability of retrenching. The only way out of our difficulties is for you to make a good match; and as for Frank and Edgar, they must do the best they can for themselves. Should anything happen to your father, they will have nothing but your charity and their own exertions to depend upon. If you were to marry a woman without money, you would be reduced in a few years to comparative beggary, and a Government office or genteel poverty on the Continent."

"Trust me, mother dear; I am not very likely to let my feelings get the better of my judgment."

As days went on, Lady Vaynham was surprised and chagrined to find that her eldest son and Maria took so little to each other. There was an unusual captiousness in Marie's manner to George; and in return he was aggressive and contradictory to her.

"Really," said Lady Vaynham, a little crossly one day, after a more than usually sharp discussion between them, "there is no peace when you two are together—nothing but perpetual sparring; I am quite tired of it!"

It was the first time she had ever spoken a cross word to Marie. The girl rose and left the room; and George Vaynham saw there were tears in her eyes.

"I wonder, mother," he said, sharply, "you should speak so harshly to the poor girl! She has no father or mother, and her being entirely dependent on you might make you more considerate."

"My dear George!" exclaimed his mother, "how unfair you are! You have been saying all kinds of malicious, provoking things to her, and when I scold you both for your quarrelsomeness, and she takes it all to herself, you turn round and find fault with me."

Mr. Vaynham, having no reply to make to his mother's very just remarks, was silent; but when he found Marie

alone in the afternoon, he went up to her, and sitting down beside her, said gently:

"Will you forgive me, Antoinette, for my rudeness?"

"Does Mr. Vaynham really admit that he has been rude?" Marie asked, a little scornfully.

"Mr. Vaynham not only admits it, but apologizes for it. Why don't you call me George?" he continued: "I call you Antoinette?"

"I never asked you to do so."

"Would you rather I called you Mademoiselle de Montolieu?"

"It is a matter of perfect indifference to me."

"Very well, then; I shall continue to call you Antoinette."

"And why Antoinette? Every one calls me Marie here."

"Because I like to be different from every one else—particularly where you are concerned."

"That means, I suppose, that because every one else loves you, you choose to dislike me."

"How do you know that I dislike you, Antoinette?"

"Because you take such pains to let me see it, Mr. Vaynham."

"Can you not imagine that I may have a reason for not wishing to like you?"

"No, indeed," said Marie, opening her bright eyes, and fixing them on his face; "no, indeed; unless," she added, after a pause, "you are jealous of the shelter and kindness which your good parents have given to a poor friendless stranger."

"Antoinette! Antoinette! how can you say anything so cruel?" exclaimed George Vaynham, all the more pained by her remark because there had been some truth in it. "Can you not imagine that if I allowed myself to like you, I should be unable to keep from loving you?" And his eyes melted into a tenderness which sent a thrill to Marie's heart, and an inexplicable feeling of surprise and pleasure.

Frank Vaynham entered the room at the moment, and further conversation was put a stop to.

Do any of my readers know the singular fascination that a man and woman have for each other when they have begun by a cordial dislike, and suddenly discover that dislike has given place to love? From that very day and hour, George Vaynham and Marie de Montolieu began to love each other with an engrossing passion, although to outward

observers the change of feeling was not perceptible. Mr. Vaynham was keenly conscious of the imprudence of his growing passion, but had not courage to tear himself away from it; while Marie, knowing no obstacle in the way of her love, and yet uncertain, by reason of his occasional fits of coldness, whether it was returned, was strictly guarded in her conduct.

In one corner of Lady Vaynham's drawing-room was a little recess with one window, shut off from the rest of the room. George was very fond of sitting at this window in an arm-chair, either reading or watching the passers-by. One day he was in his favorite corner, engrossed in a very interesting book. Suddenly he was aroused by an animated conversation in the next room, and he at once recognized the speakers to be Marie and the Marquis of Poyns. The position was an awkward one; he had no wish to be an eavesdropper, but there was no exit, except through the drawing-room, and as he did not know long they had been there, he scarcely liked to get up and go, for fear they should think he had been for some time an intentional listener. So he sat perfectly still, and heard something that made his ears tingle. Lord Poyns was the speaker.

"I saw Lord Vaynham this morning," he said, "and he gave my suit his fullest and most cordial approbation. I love you very dearly—will you be my wife?"

Lord Poyns could not have waited more breathlessly for the answer than did George Vaynham.

"Lord Poyns," replied Marie, in a low voice, "I am fully sensible of the honor you do me in wishing to make me your wife, but I scarcely know—I was unprepared for this—I—I—"

"Dear Marie," interposed Lord Poyns, quickly, "take time to consider. I have no wish to hurry your decision—I will wait a week—a month, if you like; only bear in mind how devotedly I love you, and that, please God, I will make you a true and faithful husband."

"I only ask two days," Marie replied, in a low voice; "in that time you shall have my answer."

"I would be content to wait two years if I were sure what your answer would be then."

And George Vaynham saw him take the little hand in his reverentially, and kiss it tenderly. His blood boiled at the sight; he felt then all she was to him, and what it

would cost him to relinquish his passion, and see her the wife of another man. When Lord Poyns was gone, he stepped quickly into the room, and confronted Marie. She started up, surprised and frightened, at the expression of his face.

"Mr. Vaynham!" she exclaimed.

"I have heard everything Lord Poyns said to you. Oh! Antoinette, for God's sake tell me what answer you are going to make him!"

"I do not know—I have not had time to think," she answered, trembling and confused.

"You do not, you can not love him," cried George, passionately. "You shall not marry him. Antoinette, I worship you with all the passion of my heart; it would kill me to see you married to another. Do you not care for me?—tell me at once—I cannot bear the suspense."

He held her arm so tightly that she uttered a cry of pain:

"Oh, George, you hurt me!"

It was the first time she had ever called him by that name, and he knew she would not have done so now, if she had not loved him.

"My darling, forgive me!" he cried; "I would not hurt you for all the world."

And taking the unresisting form in his arms, he kissed her brow, and lips, and hands, passionately, until she was covered with crimson blushes.

"You will never marry any one but me?" he whispered.

"Never!" she replied, in a low, firm voice.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SACRIFICE OF A LIFE.

MARIE DE MONTOLIEU sat before her glass, engrossed in a profound reflection. She was going to a grand ball with Lady Vaynham that night, and was waiting for the maid to dress her.

"How sorry I am about Lord Poyns," she thought; "if I had only known—if I could only have foreseen—I would have told him all honestly at once. But I could not act otherwise than I did, not knowing George really cared for me. Ah! how happy I am in his love; it almost makes me

selfish in my gladness. I wonder if Lord Poyns will be very sorry? He is so kind, and good, and gentle, it would grieve me to think he should suffer. Oh, how I wish I had told him I could not be his wife! He will think from my indecision I meant to marry him. And so I did, before Mr. Vaynham spoke. I was not sure he cared for me. What will Lord and Lady Vaynham say? I think they will be glad, for I am sure they love me; and do I not love them, too? My dear, kind benefactors? I cannot imagine why George will not let me tell his mother. He says there is a very particular reason for silence on the subject just at present; but how, then, shall I account to Lady Vaynham for my rejection of Lord Poyns? I fear, as it is, she will be angry with me, for I know how much she liked him."

The lady's maid came in at this juncture, and Marie had no more time for reflection. But the next morning, after breakfast, she retired to her room, to indite a letter to Lord Poyns. She had commenced two or three, and was sitting absorbed in thought, when a gentle tap was heard at the door, and Lady Vaynham entered.

"Well, my love," she said, cheerfully, "am I to congratulate you?"

"On what, dear Lady Vaynham?"

"Am I to salute you as the future Lady Poyns? I have not had a moment's leisure to ask you before, but I felt so certain of your answer, that the question was almost superfluous."

Mlle. de Montolieu colored deeply.

"I do not intend to be Lady Poyns," she said, slowly.

"Marie! you are jesting; you would surely not be mad enough to refuse such a splendid offer?"

"I am in earnest, dear Lady Vaynham; I am at this moment writing my refusal."

"Marie! what do you mean? Have you any idea what you are doing? Do you remember that you have given Lord Poyns every encouragement, and that to refuse him would not only be ill-judged, but heartless in the extreme?"

"Do not say that!" cried Marie, imploringly.

"But I must say it," said her ladyship, angrily. "It is impossible you can have changed your mind since yesterday. Why did you not tell him then, frankly and fairly, that you did not intend to marry him?" And Lady Vaynham looked, as she indeed felt, very angry.

"I look upon your conduct as a piece of abominable coquetry."

Marie burst into tears. She longed to tell her friend everything, but she was under a promise of secrecy to George, and did not dare to break it.

"Then am I to understand," Lady Vaynham said at length, "that you are bent on refusing Lord Poyns?"

"Yes," answered Marie, in a low voice; and Lady Vaynham swept angrily from the room. Marie sat before her desk a long time, and it was only just as the lunch-bell rang that she finished and directed her letter. It ran as follows:

"DEAR LORD POYNS,—When you read this letter, I fear you will think I have acted dishonorably, and with unpardonable coquetry. When you asked me yesterday to be your wife, and I begged of you to give me time to consider your proposal, I had every intention of accepting an offer which did me so much honor; but since that time the whole current of my life and thoughts has changed. May I trust in you, and tell you the real truth? Ever since I first knew you, I have esteemed and liked you greatly. When you asked me to be your wife, I thought I could love you and be true to you, as I know you would have been to me. I will not conceal anything from you, because you are good and generous, and I believe you will not think worse of me for my confession. For weeks past I have loved one very dearly, who I could not be sure loved me in return. But yesterday he told me that he cared for me; I have promised to be his wife. Dear Lord Poyns, if my conduct seems to you heartless, or wanting in delicacy, I throw myself on your generosity to excuse me, and believe that there is no one who appreciates your goodness or nobleness of character more than

"MARIE DE MONTOLIEU."

The following day Marie received this answer to her letter:

"DEAR MADemoiselle DE MONTOLIEU,—I can not pretend that your letter has given me other than bitter grief and disappointment, but I fully appreciate and recognize the fact that it has not been caused by any want of consideration on your part, but by a force of circumstances

beyond your control. Dearly as I love you, I can not wish any one else joy in the possession of you; but my regard and admiration for yourself can never be lessened.

"Most truly yours,

POYNS."

Large tears dropped on the letter as Marie folded it reverently and put it away in her desk. A noble heart that could take disappointment so kindly and generously, was worth some tears of regret. She told Mr. Vaynham of her letter to Lord Poyns, and his mother's annoyance, and begged him to tell Lady Vaynham, or let her tell her the whole truth. George Vaynham would not hear of it.

"Do not ask me the reason, my darling," he pleaded; "I can not tell you just at present; but in a few weeks all shall be revealed, and there will be no further occasion for secrecy."

Meantime, George Vaynham was in a terrible state of perplexity. Not for one moment did he wish the past recalled—he was far too much enamored of his dear Antoinette for that—but the difficulties that would follow on the confession of his passion looked thick and dark. What would his mother say? How on earth should he pay his debts?—and what was to become of them all in years to come?

"What a fool I was not to go away when I first saw my danger! And yet I can not bring myself to repent what I have done. And my darling is so unconscious of all my troubles, too. She seems to fancy my father and mother will rejoice at our engagement. Poor little soul! Well, she will know all soon. But how to break it to my mother—that's the very devil! I think I shall sound my father first. I must do something."

But circumstances took the necessity of action out of his hands. Lady Vaynham was going into the drawing-room one afternoon to look for Marie. The door was ajar, and she pushed it softly open, and was about to enter, when something she saw caused her to draw back, overpowered with astonishment. Her eldest son and Marie were standing together, with their backs turned toward her; his arm was thrown round the girl, and her head leaned against his shoulder. Lady Vaynham was too indignant to confront them; she turned noiselessly, and went into the library, where she burst into tears. All her anger fell on Marie.

"The abominable hypocrite!" she thought, "to pretend to dislike him! So this is why she refused Lord Poyns. But come what will, she shall not have George. He never could be so mad, so wicked, as to dream of marrying her!" and she rang the bell.

"Ask Mr. Vaynham to come to me at once," she said to the servant who appeared. And she sat in deep thought until the door opened again, and her son entered.

"What is the meaning of all this, George?"

"Of all what? Really, my dear mother, you must be a little more explicit," he answered, lightly, but with a very uncomfortable sensation at his heart.

"I went into the drawing-room just now," Lady Vaynham said, in clear, incisive tones, "and I saw you standing with your arm round Mademoiselle de Montolieu. That is what I want to know the meaning of."

George Vaynham comprehended at once that there was nothing for it but to tell his mother the truth.

"Mother," he began, after a pause, "I love her very dearly, and I have asked her to be my wife."

"Indeed!" remarked Lady Vaynham, with some sarcasm. "Then am I to understand that your pretended dislike to each other has been assumed for the purpose of blinding me to your real feelings?"

"Dear mother, do not be angry. When first I came I fancied I disliked your *protégée*, and for some time the feeling continued, until one day I accidentally overheard Lord Poyns's proposal to her. That showed me what my true sentiments were toward her, and I forgot everything, and implored her to reject him and to marry me."

"Then, in the indulgence of your passion, you forgot your father and mother, your debts, the position in which we stand—in short, everything but yourself."

There was a bitterness in Lady Vaynham's voice which her son had never heard before.

"Mother," he said softly, "I love her so dearly."

"Listen to me, George," exclaimed his mother, angrily. "You know as well as I do that marriage with a penniless girl like Marie is out of the question. Relinquish her at once, and I do not doubt but that she has art enough to bring back Lord Poyns to her feet."

"Never, mother!" replied George, firmly. "Nothing shall induce me to give her up."

"Then, in your selfish passion, you will sacrifice the mother who bore you, and the father who has indulged every whim since your childhood? You will reduce them to beggary, and be content with outlawry or a debtor's prison yourself?"

Mr. Vaynham winced. He knew his mother had not overdrawn the picture, and that her indignation was just; but he could not give up his darling Antoinette.

Lady Vaynham rose from her seat and came toward him. She put her arm softly round his neck and kissed him.

"George, do not break my heart."

"Mother," he exclaimed in a choking voice, "do not ask me to give up my dearest hope!"

"I must ask you, for your father's sake, for mine, for your own. By every tie that binds you to us, by every sense of honor and duty, I call on you to give her up."

"Anything but that, mother. I can not—I will not!" and Mr. Vaynham rose and left the room.

Lady Vaynham sat down in the chair which he had vacated, and cried bitterly.

"It is always so," she murmured. "How selfish men are! They will give up parents, wife, children, all for their selfish passion; and in turn they will sacrifice the very object of their passion for something they deem at the time a greater good. But this folly must and shall be prevented. I will appeal to Marie herself. Women *are* capable of self-sacrifice now and then; and if she knows that by marrying her he will ruin himself and his family, she will surely give him up. How wrong, how foolish I was ever to consent to receiving her into the house! It is so dangerous to have a fascinating girl with young men; and Frenchwomen seem to have a *savoir faire* that exercises a wonderful influence over them."

The next evening Lord and Lady Vaynham and Mr. Vaynham had been invited to a grand dinner at one of the foreign embassies. Mlle. de Montolieu had not been included in the invitation. Lady Vaynham had complained of headache early in the afternoon, and had gone to lie down about five o'clock. Marie went to her room with some tea. She tapped at the door and entered.

"How is your head now, dear Lady Vaynham?" she asked. "I have brought you some tea, thinking it might refresh you."

"Thank you," Lady Vaynham replied, coldly; "I am better—I do not need it."

Marie's eyes filled with tears, and she came up close to the couch where her protectress was lying.

"Lady Vaynham, have I offended you? Since yesterday your manner to me has been so cold and chilling—different from anything I have known it before."

Lady Vaynham's heart smote her.

"I have not intended to be unkind to you, Marie," she said, gently.

"Oh! not unkind, Lady Vaynham—I do not say unkind."

"But that was what you meant, my love."

"Remembering all that you have been to me, whatever you might say or do now, I would not use that word."

"Come here, Marie," said her ladyship, softly; "shall I tell you the truth?"

"Yes, pray do!" cried Marie, eagerly.

"I am deeply pained to find my son loves you."

"How, madame?" cried Mlle. de Montolieu, blushing deeply, and drawing herself up with a proud gesture.

"I do not think that either of you deceived me intentionally, but your manner to each other always led me to believe you were rather averse to each other."

"I did not like Mr. Vaynham at first," Marie said. "But may I ask, Lady Vaynham, why it grieves you to hear that Mr. Vaynham loves me? Do you consider the daughter of a marquis of the proudest blood in France inferior to your son?"

"You mistake me, Marie," replied Lady Vaynham, gently, "it is not that."

"What then, madame?"

"Will you listen to me patiently, my love, while I tell you something?"

Mlle. de Montolieu bent her head in reply.

"You doubtless," proceeded Lady Vaynham, "in common with the rest of the world, believe that our family is in a position to keep up its rank by means of sufficient wealth; but such is not the case. We are poor, wretchedly, miserably poor—poor in reality, as the very beggar who asks alms at our door. Lord Vaynham's father, and we after him, have every year exceeded our income; and the result is that every part of the estate is heavily mortgaged. Our only hope is in George. If he marries Miss Cathcart,

who, there is no doubt, would gladly accept him, we shall be saved from present embarrassment, and ruin in the future. George, as it is, is heavily in debt. Frank and Edgar are little better; and for ourselves, I dare scarcely think what our liabilities are!"

"Oh, Lady Vaynham," cried Marie, "why did you not tell me this before, instead of letting me be an additional burden to you? I will go out—I will work for you all—I will do what I can."

"My child," said Lady Vaynham, compassionately, "I know your heart is good, but what could you do for us? Do you know that nothing under eighty thousand pounds could help us?"

"Eighty thousand pounds!" cries Marie, aghast.

"Eighty thousand pounds," repeated Lady Vaynham, slowly. "And that is why it is impossible for George to marry you."

"Oh, Lady Vaynham, do not say impossible," cried Marie, in agonized tones; "it will break my heart to part from him."

"Will you condemn the man you love to poverty and a debtor's prison?"

"I can share his poverty and console him," said Marie.

"Then you have no thought for us, Marie? for Lord Vaynham, and myself, who have been as a father and mother to you—you will let poverty come upon our old age, when a word from you might prevent it?"

Marie hid her face in her hands, and wept bitterly. They might have been tears of blood in the anguish that was sweeping over her soul. Lady Vaynham was silent while the conflict went on. Her own heart reproached her for the part she was taking. It must have been love that had induced Marie to accept her son. To be Marchioness of Poyns was an older, prouder title than Baroness Vaynham. Suddenly the choking sobs ceased, and Marie stood upright before her.

"I have decided between love and duty, Lady Vaynham," she said, with natural calmness.

"God reward you for your generous sacrifice, dear Marie," said Lady Vaynham, earnestly, bending forward to embrace her. But Mlle. de Montolieu drew back and left the room.

At eight o'clock, when Lord and Lady Vaynham and

their son had left the house for the grand dinner at the embassy, Marie, with a breaking heart, was employed in packing her trunks. She was quite resolved on her course of action. At ten o'clock the servants, in some surprise, called a hackney-coach, and put Mlle. de Montolieu with her boxes into it. Marie drove to a remote part of London, where she was certain of not being discovered, and for a time lived on the proceeds of a few jewels which had belonged to her mother. Then she obtained a situation as governess, in a family going abroad, and subsequently entered Sir Howard Champion's family, from which we have traced her.

Two years afterward she learned that the Hon. George Vaynham had married Miss Cathcart. But she never heard of the bitter, undying feud, that remained between him and his mother, nor of the haunting remorse that never left Lady Vaynham until the day of her death.

CHAPTER XIII.

APPLES OF THE DEAD SEA.

MOST of the guests had left Hazell Court; and only Lord Harold Erskine and Mr. Le Marchant remained. It was the fourth day after the ball, and Lord Harold had ridden over to Hurst Manor, to call on the Champions, while his friend had driven Mr. Hastings' team some ten miles distant, to make a call on a young lady he had been very much *épris* with at the ball. Errol had declined to accompany either; he was in a very desultory, unsatisfactory state of mind, and found it difficult to resolve upon any particular course of action. His thoughts were anything but enviable. First, he reproached himself with his conduct to Miss Champion; then he tried to fix some plan of foreign travel, that should make him forget his dilemma at home; and then his thoughts would return to Winifred, from whom they had been absent scarcely an hour during the last five days. He could not forget her, do what he would—those sweet, tearful brown eyes haunted him day and night. Having once known and loved her, how could he reconcile himself to lonely days out of sight and hearing of her?—how be content with absence from the one

woman who had caused every pulse and nerve to vibrate with a new sensation? If she could only have been descended from a proud old family like Flora Champion his happiness would have been complete.

At seven o'clock in the evening, Mr. Hastings strolled toward the woods. He told himself he hoped he should not meet Miss Eyre, it would be so awkward, so unpleasant; and yet he went in the direction that she always took on her return from the cottage, and at the very hour he knew she should pass. He stood for some minutes leaning over the gate through which she must come, and looked restlessly out for her, pretending to himself he was so glad she had not come, and yet in feverish fear lest she had already passed. The perversity of human nature is a very curious study. People are very fond of acting a little play to themselves, and, like Acco, pretend to wish for the frustration of their dearest hopes. But when Errol saw Winifred coming along slowly and sadly through the woods, the play was at an end, and he could no longer conceal from himself the delight he experienced at seeing her again.

When Winifred, in the distance, saw him standing at the gate, and recognized whose form it was, she felt an angry flutter at her heart, and was half inclined to turn back again. But then she drew herself up into cold stateliness. "He shall not guess my real feelings, or how bitterly I have suffered for him," she thought.

Mr. Hastings stood at the gate waiting for her. His eyes dwelt lovingly on her graceful movements as she came toward him, and he felt an embarrassment such as he had never known in the presence of a woman before. Winifred appeared unconscious of him until she came close to the gate, and then she looked up with an air of cool indifference that might have befitted the best-bred woman in Europe. Errol did not open the gate, but put his hand across to her. She affected not to see it. "Miss Eyre," he said, "will you not even take my hand?"

"No, I thank you," answered Winifred, coldly; "I do not choose to be known one day, and unnoticed the next."

"What do you mean, Miss Eyre? I do not understand you."

"I mean this, Mr. Hastings; we have met several times, and I was foolish enough to imagine that it was on equal

terms, until you reminded me, by passing me unnoticed with your high-born friends, that you were the lord of the manor, and I only a farmer's daughter."

She uttered these words, standing before him, with an air of proud disdain, such as Cleopatra might have worn when summoned to the judgment of Antony.

"Damnation! how proud she is!" thought Errol.

"Miss Eyre," he said, quickly, "it is impossible you should attribute motives so false and mean to me."

"Why impossible?" Winifred asked, looking at him with cold, clear eyes. "I know nothing of you, Mr. Hastings."

Her self-command in this speech was wonderful, for her heart was fluttering tumultuously, as a woman's heart always does when she is saying a bitter thing to the man she loves. There was silence for a moment, and then she said quietly:

"Will you let me pass, Mr. Hastings?"

"No," he cried, suddenly and passionately, "you shall not pass until you have recalled those words."

"Then I must retrace my steps," Winifred said, looking at him defiantly.

He seized her hand.

"You shall not go until you tell me why you are so bitter and angry with me to-day."

"I am not angry or bitter," she quickly replied, forcing back the rebellious tears. "Only—"

"Only what?" Errol asked.

"Do not torture me, Mr. Hastings!" exclaimed Winifred. "It is cruel, unmanly of you. Let me go! I will not tell you."

"But you shall tell me!" he said, still keeping hold of her hand, and there was a dangerous light in his eyes that made her half afraid of him.

"I do not wish to tell you—you force me to it!" she cried.

"I will not stir from here except you tell me."

Winifred's voice was half choked with excitement as she answered—"Then hear it. I hate you! You have been cruel, inconsiderate, unjust to me."

"I?" said Errol.

"Yes, you! You tried to make a simple, inexperienced, country girl, care for you, with your refinement and fascinations; and when you succeeded you despised her for her

folly, and turned away from her contemptible simplicity to the woman who, from her birth and station, was worthy of your real love."

"Winifred! Miss Eyre!" exclaimed Errol, "how can you have mistaken me so? Do you imagine there is any one in the world but yourself for whom I care?"

"Yes, for your betrothed, Miss Champion, Mr. Hastings."

"I am neither betrothed to Miss Champion nor yet to any other woman," he exclaimed, quickly.

"Do not attempt to deceive me any further," Winifred said, with a flush of anger. "Your relations with Miss Champion can scarcely be doubtful, after your opening the ball with her before all your grand friends."

"How the devil does she know that?" Errol thought.

"Miss Eyre," he said, gravely, "will you accept my solemn assurance that I have not asked Miss Champion to be my wife, and that I have no intention of doing so? There is only one woman in the world that I love, and I love her with all the passion of my soul. Because she is so dear to me, I am going to leave my country, and the home for which I have longed, and I am going to be a wanderer again on the face of the earth."

"You are going away?" cried Winifred, in a tremulous voice.

"Yes, I am going away from country, home, and friends, because, being near her, I can not control my passionate longing for her; I can not tear my thoughts from her, or bring myself to look with love or admiration on any other woman."

The gate was open now, and Mr. Hastings had taken Winifred in his arms.

"My darling," he whispered, "do you know who that woman is?"

Winifred was confused, surprised, ashamed, and yet withal a tumultuous joy overshadowed her whole being. Then this fairy-tale was true, after all, and this splendid, gallant knight was at her feet in all truth and sincerity.

"Winifred," he said, passionately, "look into my eyes, and tell me that you love me."

She raised her beautiful shy brown eyes to his, and he bent down and kissed her so fondly, so tenderly, that she could no longer doubt his truth. And then there was a

silence, a long silence, for the spell of the day-dream seemed too sweet to be broken by words.

In this moment every happiness that Winifred had ever dreamed of was realized. Mr. Hastings loved her; she would be his wife; society would receive her, and she herself would be one of the gay world that she had so often envied. He had not deceived her; he had not been one of those heartless men of the world, against whom Mme. de Montolieu had warned her; he was truth and honor itself.

"My darling," whispered Errol, "will you go abroad with me, and see all the wonderful places in the world that you once told me you longed to visit? I shall have so much to show you, so much to tell you of, that we need not return to England for years and years."

A sharp pang crossed Winifred's breast for the moment.

"Is he ashamed of me," she thought, "that he wants to take me away from England?" but she did not give utterance to her thoughts.

"I shall dearly love to go abroad, and see all the wonders there," she said; "but I should like to see England first, and the beauties of my own country."

"My darling, you shall go wherever you will; your sweet wish shall be my law; not one thought shall be ungratified if I can procure its accomplishment."

"You will laugh when I tell you what my great desire is."

"No, I shall not—tell me, dearest."

"I want to ride in the park and go to the opera."

"You shall have horses and carriages as many as you list, and a box at the opera. There is only one thing I fear."

"And what is that?" Winifred said, smiling up in his face.

"I am afraid, my own darling, if my love will content you—if it will satisfy you for everything you may have to bear."

"What shall I have to bear?" she asked, brightly; "the fate you promise to me seems a perpetual Paradise. Do you know," she said, looking into his face with such a look as he had often longed to see in her eyes, "that your love alone would seem heaven to me if you were as poor as I am—if you had none of the advantages of wealth and rank to bestow on me that you have?"

"My God!" thought Errol, as a sudden idea flashed on his mind, "she does not understand me—she thinks I am asking her to be my wife. Winifred, I will not deceive you; I have no rank to give you; but if you love me, my darling, with all your heart and soul, as I do you, you will forget that. I swear before God that I will never leave you—that I will be all to you that the most tender, loving husband could be; you shall have my heart, my life, my wealth, everything I possess in the world but my name."

In all the after-years Mr. Hastings never forgot the expression that came into Winifred's face as he spoke those words—the terrible anguish, the indignation, the horror. A great gasping sob broke from her lips, and she leaned against the gate for support, and covered her face with her hands. And as he watched her, Errol would have given all he possessed to have left those words unspoken.

"How could I have been so mad," he thought, "to insult a pure-minded girl like this with such an offer!"

A longing came over him to justify himself in her eyes; he knew no words could atone for the deadly insult he had offered to her purity and pride. There was bitter remorse already in his heart.

"Miss Eyre!" he exclaimed, passionately, "I dare not ask your forgiveness, but you must listen to me for one moment. The first time I saw you I loved you, and every time that we have met since I have loved you more and more, until at last I almost felt as if existence without you was impossible. Do you know that I gave the ball that night in honor of Miss Champion, and that I intended to ask her to be my wife; but that when we were alone together the thought of you stole over me, and my soul revolted from the thought of any other than you? I resolved to leave England—to go abroad, somewhere where I should be removed from the temptation of seeing or hearing of you. But to-day, when I saw you coming toward me, all my strength failed me. I felt how passionately I loved you, and in my madness I uttered those words I would to God now I had left unspoken. But, Miss Eyre, you can not, you will not believe that any light thought of you gave them birth or utterance. I believe in your pure womanhood more devoutly than ever I did in any other; it was my mad despair at the impossibility of marrying you that tempted me to what I feel now was a foul outrage. Do you

know that for centuries back my race have suffered for one rash vow? time after time they have sacrificed their love, their hopes, to it, and I dared not be the first to break it by marrying one who, though my equal, nay, my superior in all else, was beneath me in rank."

"Beneath you?" cried Winifred, with flashing, indignant eyes—"beneath you, Mr. Hastings? You deemed Flora Champion a worthy bride, and am I not equally the granddaughter of Sir Howard? It is true, my father may be only a gentleman farmer, but he can count his ancestors to have been the same for centuries back, as far as the Hastings of Hazell. It is true," she added, bitterly, "that they may not have had that refinement, that position which entitled them to insult an unprotected woman."

"The granddaughter of Sir Howard Champion!" Mr. Hastings said, scarcely believing he heard aright.

"My mother was his daughter!" and with a proud, passionate gesture, Winifred turned away.

Errol stood motionless, leaning against the gate. He felt as if brain, heart, and limb were paralyzed by what he had just heard.

Sir Howard's granddaughter! Then that accounted for the air of breeding which had so puzzled him, and there was in truth no reason why he should not make her his wife. If he could only have known that before, he might have been spared the misery, the humiliation of having made himself so vile in her eyes. And Flora Champion and Reginald? They knew it, and had concealed it from him all this while. Lady Grace Farquhar must have known it—all his servants, and every one who lived in the neighborhood; and yet some strange fatality had conspired to keep him in ignorance of a fact it would have sealed his happiness to know. It was too late now. He knew her pride; he knew that if he had the crowns and the wealth of India to offer her, she would reject him in scorn now.

And she *had* loved him dearly, he knew that, or she would never have suffered his kisses on her lips, or looked lovingly into his face with those sweet brown eyes. He felt maddened by his thoughts, by the recollection of what was, and what might have been. And he turned his steps homeward, not lingeringly, not hopefully, as he had come, but swiftly, half mad with the crushing despair of a withered desire. He went home and locked himself in his room; he forbade

any one entrance, and he neither eat nor slept that night. All through the long, dark hours he paced incessantly to and fro. The dear image of his love haunted him: his passion seemed to increase tenfold, now that he had lost all hope. If the sacrifice of his name, his rank, his pride could have atoned to her for his mad words, and brought back her love, he would have yielded them all up gladly so he might have seen the tenderness kindle once again in those dear eyes, and heard her say, "I forgive you."

All the time that Mr. Hastings and Winifred had been talking together, an evil face had watched them through the brushwood above. It belonged to Mr. Tom Fenner, who was there for the purpose of espionage. Ever since Miss Eyre had refused his suit with so much hauteur, he had watched her unseen, and dogged her footsteps, in the hope of discovering something that would afford him the longed-for revenge. And to-day at last he had been successful. "Not so long to wait either," he thought. He had not been near enough to hear the words, but he guessed very well the purport of their conversation, from their looks and gestures. And when he saw Winifred turn away with proud, indignant tears in her eyes, he rubbed his hands and chuckled to himself softly.

"Aha! my lady," he thought, "it's your turn to have your pride hurt now. I told you the Hastings didn't mate with farmers' daughters. And you, my fine fellow," he continued, sneeringly, apostrophizing Errol, "you're sorry for what you've done, now; you wish you had not put your fingers so near the fire, don't you? I shall have my revenge yet. Perhaps it won't seem such a mighty condescension now to be the wife of an honest man when you've been asked to be the mistress of a grand swell—eh! Miss Eyre? Mrs. Tom Fenner of Chalk Farm. Well, to be sure, it don't sound quite so grand as Mrs. Hastings of Hazell Court. But I shouldn't be surprised if you don't come to that yet, my wench." And Mr. Fenner thrust his hands into his pockets, and walked home in a state of bitter, malicious glee.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DEPTHS OF BITTERNESS.

WINIFRED turned her steps mechanically homeward. She seemed hardly to touch the ground as she walked; her passion, her anguish impelled her to quick motion lest she should have time to reflect. Through the woods, out of the gate, along the road, until she came to her home, and then into her room, locking the door behind her. She did not burst into a flood of tears; she was beyond that; but she sat down by the window, and looked vacantly out at the garden, and beyond into the road. A hand of ice seemed to be pressing on her heart—the power of thought, of remembrance, was gone from her, and yet she was vaguely conscious of some horrible misfortune. She noted everything that passed before her eyes; but with a dreamy, soulless gaze; it seemed rather as if she had some other identity—as if she saw through the medium of some other person's eyes and thoughts. And yet that scene was indelibly impressed on her mind; hundreds of times it seemed to come before her in the nights and days of misery that followed. The August sun had set, but its glorious shadows remained in clouds of golden flame which illuminated the dark masses of trees in the opposite woods. On the common there were children picking the purple heather, and two men loading a pony-cart with bracken. She saw a cart laden with fine timber coming up the road, and she wondered vaguely if it was going to Mr. Hart's, the timber merchant at Holton, and what he would do with it when it got there.

A group of harvest tramps went by, laughing and shouting, and she wondered if they were really merry and happy, or if their hearts ached sometimes as hers did. She noted the cows wandering by the broad pool of water, and stopping now and then to drink, and two little boys throwing stones at them in the interval of sailing their mimic boat. A cart went by, a pony-carriage, and then a solitary horseman appeared on the brow of the hill, and she watched him with a curious, apathetic wonder if it was any one she knew. He drew nearer, and as she recognized him, her consciousness came back with a start, and she awoke to the full

bitterness of her position. It was Lord Harold Erskine, Mr. Hastings' friend. She remembered her shame, her horror, her misery, and the flood-gates were opened at last, and convulsive sobs shook her frame.

"Why should all this suffering come upon me?" she thought; "is it to punish me for my discontent, for my longing for something better than the dull monotony of my life? Have I been allowed for a little time to sun myself in the happy belief that the existence I craved lay before me, only to be awakened to the fact that it was infamy, not an exalted station that was offered me? What have I done that he should think so lightly of me as to dare say such things to me? Have I forgotten my modesty? have I accepted his flattery too eagerly? have I put myself in his way? Oh! if I could only have died before this happened—if I could only die now, sink into oblivion, and forget all my shame and my misery! I can understand now why people drown and poison themselves. When all the sweetness is gone out of life, what is there worth living for? But if it should be true what Mme. de Montolieu says, what then? She says God sends us a certain amount of suffering in this world, and is it likely that we can cheat Him, or alter His designs, by terminating our existence in a fit of impatient cowardice? I thought it had almost broken my heart when I believed he loved Miss Champion; but what was that to this? If I live to be old, shall I ever forget or outgrow the stigma of his contempt; or will it brand my soul until the day I die? If my father should ever know a word of this, O my God? what should I do? But surely no one can hear of it; *he* could not be so base, so dastardly as to confess how he has outraged me. And I thought him so true, so noble, so honorable—more than human flesh and blood; a Launcelot for beauty—a giant for honor. If I had never seen him—if I could have gone on living my simple country life without fear and without reproach! My father spoke the truth, then, when he said he could look for no better fate for me than to be the wife of a farmer. I might have been fit for that if I had been brought up like other farmers' daughters; if I had been taught at the village school, and made to churn the butter, and look after the chickens, instead of learning accomplishments, and dreaming of things above my station." Winifred never slept that night; it seemed as if some appalling, haunting misfortune

had come to her that she could not forget. There was a weary, wide-open look in her eyes, that frightened the servants when she came down in the morning. Miss Winifred was surely going to be took with a dreadful illness—what should they do, and master and all so far away at the cattle fair? She did not play, or work, or read, but she sat, her face resting on her hands, looking far away over the common, and ever and anon sighing a deep, long-drawn sigh.

It was the afternoon of the day after her meeting with Mr. Hastings, and she was sitting before the window, her hands lying in her lap, and her eyes shut. Suddenly a shadow seemed to pass before them, and unclosing them, she beheld the evil, malicious face of Tom Fenner, looking in upon her through the window. She started up in angry terror, and he turned away to the door. She rang the bell sharply.

“If Mr. Fenner calls here,” she said to the servant, “I will on no account see him. Tell him my father is absent, and I do not expect him back before Friday.”

“Yes, miss,” replied the girl, and went out to answer the door-bell, which rang at the moment. Winifred heard voices in discussion for some moments, and then the servant came back. “If you please, miss, he says he *must* see you; he’s quite sure you won’t refuse him.”

“Tell him once for all that my father is away, and I will *not* see him,” Winifred uttered, haughtily.

The servant went away, but returned again a moment after.

“I am sure, miss, I don’t like to trouble you again,” she said, “but Mr. Fenner *would* have me come in. He said he was quite sure you’d see him, if I told you he wanted to say something about your being in the woods last night.”

All the blood rushed back from Winifred’s heart, and she trembled in every limb. She had just presence of mind left her to turn away to conceal her face. After a moment she said in an unnaturally quiet voice:

“Ask Mr. Fenner to come in.”

She remained standing as he entered, and only acknowledged his presence by the slightest inclination of her proud head. Mr. Fenner, on the contrary, nodded familiarly, and dropped into an easy-chair, putting his hat on the floor beside him. Miss Eyre said nothing, only looking at

him with a steady inquiring gaze. He answered her look with an impudent, leering smile.

"You want to know what I have come for, after your forbidding me the place, don't you?"

Winifred's blood was boiling, but she only responded by a cold gesture of assent.

"Can't you guess?" he asked, still with the same expression.

"I do not choose to try. Be good enough to tell me what your errand here is to-day as briefly as possible."

"I've come here to ask you to reconsider your answer to me the other day. Just see whether you can't make up your mind to think better of it and be Mrs. Tom Fenner."

"It is perfectly unnecessary for me to reconsider it," Winifred replied, with stinging disdain; "it was, is, and always will be, No."

"I'm not so sure of that. I shouldn't wonder a bit if you changed your mind before you've done. You see it isn't every honest man that would offer to give you his name after what has happened."

"What do you mean?" cried Winifred, trembling with passion and fear.

"You know what I mean fast enough."

Mr. Fenner was at this moment enjoying the keen pleasure that a cat appears to experience in catching a mouse. He was as much in love with Winifred as it was possible for his brute nature to be; but besides wanting to have her for his wife, he longed to be revenged on her for her scorn of him—or, as he would have called it, to pay her out for her airs. *He* didn't mind her looking disdainful—not he, she was all the prettier for that; but he'd show her who was master.

"You know what I mean," he said, with a provoking smile.

"I know nothing but this," she cried, boiling over with indignation, "that you are a mean, pitiful dastard, and that I order you to leave the house."

"Oh! yes, all in good time, but I've got something to say to you first. Would you like your father and the people about to know what your swell friend Mr. Hastings offered you last night?"

Winifred trembled in every limb. She sunk down in her chair and made a violent effort to command herself. Then

her worst suspicions were confirmed, and her shameful secret was known by this man, whom of all others she had cause to dread. She was in his power, and it was no use to be disdainful and haughty to him. She remained silent.

"I am waiting for your answer, Miss Eyre."

"May I ask what you know of my conversation with Mr. Hastings?" she asked, quietly.

"I heard every word of it," replied Mr. Fenner, to whom one lie more or less was not a matter of the smallest moment.

Winifred's heart sunk within her. "Then you were playing the spy?" she said.

"Yes, call it that if you like," he remarked, coolly. "I've been looking out for some time for a handle against you, to punish you for your behavior to me when I asked you to marry me, and I think I've got it now."

"What is it that you want of me?" Winifred said, calmly.

"I told you what I wanted. I want you to be Mrs. Tom Fenner. I'm very fond of you, in spite of your airs and graces, and I'll make you a good husband. I give you your choice, and you may have three days to think it over; whether you'll marry me in three months' time, or whether you'll let your father and the neighbors know the grand offer you got from your other lover. I won't detain you any longer now, Miss Eyre," he added, with mock politeness. "Good-bye. In three days I shall come for my answer—three days, you won't forget?" and Mr. Fenner rose, took up his hat, and went out of the room.

A blank despair seized on Winifred's heart.

"Oh! what have I done," she thought, "that all this horrible misery should come upon me? I would rather die than marry this false, cruel, cowardly wretch. Is there no escape for me, but for my father or the people round to know of my shame? I could bear anything rather than that. He would never hold up his head again, and perhaps—perhaps he would go to Mr. Hastings, and there would be terrible words between them—perhaps worse. Oh! what shall I do?—what shall I do?"

And then a vague, shadowy idea crossed her mind that she would go to her grandfather, Sir Howard, and beg him to help her, for her mother's sake. But what if he should treat her with scorn or disdain? Her misery would then

only be made additionally public. And then the thought of Flora Champion hearing of it, and fancying her smile of malicious contempt, drove all thought of such a course from her mind. To whom could she turn in her extremity—in whom confide? To Mme. de Montolieu, her old, tried friend?—Oh, no, no, no! If it had been some bitter grief, she could have told her—she would have flown at once to the heart where she was secure of tender sympathy; but a shame such as this—how could she reveal it to the pure-minded, high-bred Frenchwoman. And then her thoughts flew back to the man who had caused all this anguish.

“How I hate him!” she thought; “how I hate him! If we both lived for fifty years, and he besought me every day—every hour in the day—on his knees for forgiveness, I would never pardon him. The only happiness that could come to me in the world would be to know that some day he should come to kneel at my feet, dying of love for me, and beseeching me to be his wife, and that it should be in my power to spurn him with cold disdain.”

She sat, her head resting in her hands, in a misery unutterable—almost unconscious, from the depths of her pain. The servant came in and announced to her that tea was ready, but she neither moved nor spoke. An hour after the girl came in again.

“Won’t you come, miss? The tea was all cold, and I’ve made some fresh. Do come, miss, won’t you?”

“I am coming, Susan,” she replied, quietly; “do not wait for me?”

And then she sat without moving for another hour till her brain was racked by thought. She was trying to find some way out of this terrible trouble. She would go to Mr. Fenner—on her knees she would implore his mercy—his pity. She would appeal to his mother, and beg her intercession. Useless—worse than useless. Tom Fenner was his mother’s idol, and to pursue such a course would but exasperate him still more. How bitterly she repented her scornful treatment of him! how unceasingly her father’s words recur to her, “Winifred, I think you have behaved unwisely and unkindly.” Was he not right? She should have received his suit kindly, and tried to soften her refusal, and then he could not have borne her malice, or sought this opportunity of harming her. And, after all, this man loved her. Loved her! Could a soulless clod

and a refined gentleman be animated by the same sentiment? And then a sudden thought flashed across her. Why should she suffer instead of the man who had sinned? Why should she not throw the burden upon him, and let him bear the brunt of it?

"Shall I tell him of this wretch's threat, and call upon him to save me from the contempt that his cruelty—his outrage brings upon me? But for me to write to him after what has passed—to hold communication with him after so gross an insult! If he was base enough to utter such words to me, will he be more generous in defending me from the consequences of them? I can not. But I think I would try, if only I could find some pretext for sending a note to him."

And then she bethought herself of his books. She had only read the first volume of Thiers; Bulwer's novel was untouched; but what of that? They had escaped her memory, or she would not have kept them one hour after she knew how low, how insignificant she was in his eyes. She would write a note, and send it to Hazell Court with the books by the servant. It would not seem strange then.

And Winifred rang for lights, and sat down to her desk to write a letter, the very thought of which made her tremble with fear and anxiety. She did not begin a dozen, and tear them up in disgust—she only wrote two. The first one she wrote hastily, read it, and then put it aside. The second was commenced with more deliberation; and when she had finished it, she put it into an envelope, sealed and directed it.

"Susan, take these books and this note over to Hazell Court at once, please."

"Yes, miss. Is there any answer?"

"No."

And then Winifred sat and thought over what she had said; she remembered every word.

"You will perhaps guess that only a very urgent need induces me to hold communication with you after—after what passed last night. I do not wish to say anything about the unmanly feeling that prompted you to outrage one who never gave you an excuse for thinking lightly of her; but I call upon you to defend me from a terrible trouble

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which you have brought upon me. Your words were overheard by a Mr. Fenner, an intentional spy, whom a short time since I refused to marry. He came to me this afternoon, and threatens that if I still persist in my refusal to become his wife, he will publish your—your offer to me, to the neighborhood, and to my father. It would break his heart—I would rather die—I would rather do what is worse than death, marry the man I loath, than he should know it. I ask of you to find some means of action that will insure the silence of this man, and protect me from a marriage which I dread more than death. Mr. Fenner insists on my answer being given in three days. If you have one impulse of generosity left, you will help me.”

CHAPTER XV.

SHOT IN COLD BLOOD.

ERROL HASTINGS and his friends had just finished dinner when Miss Eyre's note was brought in. Being rather puzzled as to the handwriting, and wondering what any woman in the neighborhood could have to correspond with him about, he broke the seal and opened it. As he read, an imprecation burst from his lips, that made both his friends look up suddenly.

“Why, Errol!” exclaimed Mr. Le Marchant, “what in the devil's name's the matter?”

Mr. Hastings recovered himself in a moment.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, smiling; “I was rather annoyed at the moment. A letter from a refractory tenant.”

“Ah?” said Arthur Le Marchant, with a smiling face at the envelope which lay on the table; “lady tenants are always the most troublesome.”

All the evening Mr. Hastings seemed absent and unusually silent, and when the two other men went out for their cigars and stroll on the terrace he did not join them.

“Excuse me for half an hour,” he said. “I have some business to transact, and will follow you.”

When they were gone he rang the bell.

“Send Letsom to me at once;” and a minute afterward the old servant came hurrying.

"Letsom," said Mr. Hastings, "do you know any one of the name of Fenner hereabouts?"

"Yes, sir," answered Letsom. "There's a farmer of that name lives two miles from here, up at Chalk Farm."

"What do you know about him?"

"Well, sir, I can't say as I know much, but I have heard more lately being in conjunction with Miss Eyre."

"With Miss Eyre?"

"It was Hawkins as told me; he was that angry one night because he heard as Fenner was a-courtin' Miss Eyre. 'I'll spoil his sport, if I hear any more,' says he; 'but I'm not afraid that a lady like Miss Eyre 'ud demean herself to such as him.'"

"But Miss Eyre is only a farmer's daughter, is she?" asked Mr. Hastings, in the hope of hearing more.

"Lord bless you, sir, her father may be a farmer, 'tis true, but on the mother's side she comes of the proudest stock in the county. But there, of course you know the story, sir."

"No, I do not," said Mr. Hastings.

"Not know about Miss Champion, Mr. Errol!" exclaimed Letsom, in unbounded astonishment; "why, I thought there wasn't chick nor child in the three parishes round that didn't know that."

"Tell me Letsom, what of Miss Champion?"

Letsom bristled up with importance.

"Well, Mr. Errol, as I dare say you know, Sir Howard Champion always was the proudest gentleman in the county-side, and as I've said many a time, he seems to eat up with pride, as if other folks wasn't made of the same flesh and blood. You know, sir, he had one son and two daughters; and very fine young ladies the Miss Champions were. Well, the eldest one, *Miss* Champion, married an old man for his title; and became the Marchioness of Valanton; and the other, Miss Winifred, had grand lovers too, but she wouldn't have none of them. One time when they came down to the Manor to stop, just after her sister was married, Miss Winifred met Mr. Eyre about the lanes and fell in love with him. And a handsome young man he was, too, and quite a gentleman in his ways. So they fell in love with each other, and Miss Winifred, knowing her father would as lief see her in her grave as married to a farmer, consented to run off with him. Well, sir, as you may imagine, Sir Howard was mad when he heard of it; he cursed her on

the Bible, and never would let her be spoken of again. They say, poor thing, she did fret a deal afterward, and she died when Miss Eyre that is was born."

Mr. Hastings sat in silence for some moments. Then he raised his head and said: "What sort of character does this man Fenner bear?"

"Very fair, sir—I should say very fair; though I *have* heard he is rather nard with his men."

"And you know nothing against him?"

"No, sir, I don't indeed."

"What did Hawkins mean when he said he'd spoil Fenner's sport if he wanted to marry Miss Eyre?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, sir; but he seemed quite mad about it, and talked like as if he knew something bad about Fenner. I thought perhaps it was only talk though, because he sets such a deal on Miss Eyre."

"Send Hawkins to my room at ten o'clock to-morrow," said Mr. Hastings; "I want to ask him about the partridges;" and Mr. Hastings rose and went to join his friends on the terrace. He sat up very late that night, thinking over what had happened. He had been wretched enough before, but this letter seemed almost to have maddened him. After his parting with her, he had been ten times more infatuated with her than he was before; and he was bitterly incensed with himself for the insult contained in his words. And, after all, there was no reason on earth why he should not have married her. Why could not that prating Letsom, who was so fond of gossiping about people's affairs, have told him who she was before, and then all this horrible misery might have been spared. It would be in vain to try to atone for his words to her now, by asking her to become his wife. He knew her pride so well. What it must have cost her to write those lines!—what fear, what terrible trouble she must have been in! She had called upon him in her desperate need, and he was at his wits' end to know how to help her. This man was evidently some mean malicious hound; and should his darling, graceful, high-bred Winifred be compelled into a marriage so loathsome to her? He cursed his own folly, his own brutality, a thousand times. "I see but one way out of this pitfall—but one way. If I could find out something bad about this man, and hold it over his head, there would be a chance. Bodily fear is the only thing that can affect such natures as his. I

have no power at all over him; he holds none of my land; unfortunately it is all his own. I wonder if Hawkins really does know anything against him, or if it was only braggadocio? I will question him to-morrow. If he does, I would give him anything he asked to tell me. It would seem as if my gamekeeper, and this farmer, and myself, have one common object of devotion. There are lovers and lovers"—and with an angry sneer he rose, and went to his own room.

The following morning there was a low tap at the door, and Hawkins entered. Errol began with some questions about the partridges, and then he turned to the man and said suddenly:

"What do you know against Fenner, the farmer?"

"Me, sir!" exclaimed the man, in surprise and confusion; "nothing, sir."

"Look here, Hawkins," said Mr. Hastings, "I want to know the truth, and I'll make it well worth your while to tell me."

"There's nothing to tell, sir," answered Hawkins, doggedly.

"That's not true," Errol remarked, quietly. "If you will tell me what you know about this man Fenner, I will give you fifty pounds."

A flush of something like anger came into the broad, honest face of the gamekeeper.

"Mr. Hastings, sir," he said, "I've lived in your family's service this fourteen year, and my father was fifty years before me, and I'd serve you in any way as was honest and true. But if you offered me a thousand pounds, or if you threatened to turn me out of your employ to-night, I wouldn't be the sneak to betray a man for gold as never harmed me."

"But if I ask you, for the sake of the years you have lived with us, to tell me something that it would be an incalculable service for me to know—if I promised not to use what you might tell me against him?"

"Don't ask me, sir!" exclaimed the man, imploringly; "you're an upright, honest gentleman yourself, who wouldn't stoop to a shabby trick—don't, pray, ask me, sir!"

Mr. Hastings remained in angry and perplexed silence, whilst Hawkins stood at the door twisting his cap in his

hands, and looking the picture of discomfort and awkwardness.

Suddenly an idea occurred to him.

"Hawkins," he said, looking up, "I'm going to take you into my confidence. Attend to me while I tell you the real object I have in wishing to know something against the man Fenner. There is a young lady in the neighborhood who has a secret. It reflects no discredit or shame upon herself, only upon a person who behaved unfairly and unjustly toward her. Still, if it were known to her father or the neighborhood, it would break her heart. Fenner, by some underhand means, has got to be aware of this, and he has threatened to spread an ill report of her about if she does not consent to marry him. In her trouble she has appealed to me to help her, and the only way in which I could possibly do so would be by your giving me a handle against him."

Hawkins had listened attentively and respectfully while his master was speaking; but toward the latter part of the recital his eyes glistened, and his hands twitched nervously.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, when Mr. Hastings concluded: "I hope you won't think I'm making too free, or abusing your confidence; but was the young lady Miss Eyre?"

"Yes," replied Errol.

"Then, sir," exclaimed Hawkins, speaking fast and excitedly, "would you leave me to deal with him? I know something as will stop his mouth from annoying of her any more. Let it be between him and me, for I wouldn't like to betray him for his old mother's sake—she was very good to my poor old mother when she lay a-dying."

"It wouldn't do at all," said Mr. Hastings, sharply. "She has appealed to me for help, as one in a position to protect her, and from me alone she will accept it. It would only increase her pain and vexation tenfold if she thought any one else was aware of her trouble."

Hawkins heaved a deep sigh.

"Well, sir," he said, after a pause, "I suppose it must be as you say. I would have liked to do something to show my gratitude to Miss Eyre; but of course it's fitter for her to look to the likes of you than me. I'll tell you the story. but I'll ask you to promise that you won't use it against him, unless you're drove to it."

"With all my heart," exclaimed Errol, warmly. "I have no doubt that a little intimidation is all that will be required with a fellow like that."

"Well, sir, the story as I'm going to tell you is a dark one, and may be you'll think I've done wrong in keeping silence about it; but I'm not afraid as you'll be the one to bring me to trouble for it. I know'd as telling of it couldn't do much good, and it would have broke his mother's heart. Some three years ago, sir, there was one of Lord Lancing's gamekeepers shot in the Holton woods, and though the police searched high and low, they never came to the truth of who did it. Some time before that there had been several desperate poaching frays, and this man was a big, strong fellow, and had given two or three of the poachers bad hurts. They'd been heard to say they'd serve him out, and so of course the police suspected them the first. Well, sir, the worst of the gang was had up and examined before the magistrate, but nothing was proved against them, for every one of 'em was able to prove their *alibi*. The magistrates went on investigatin' the case day after day; but never a bit of clew did they find, though they examined heaps of witnesses. They never came nigh or asked a question of me, as could have told 'em the truth, so I kept a silent tongue in my head, for the sake of his mother as helped mine."

"Did the man die?" asked Mr. Hastings.

"No, sir, he didn't die, though for a long time the doctors thought he would. But he was wounded in the head, and he's been an idiot ever since. They got him into some 'sylum' somewheres—Lord Lancing and the parson did. I heerd as the magistrate said whoever did it would get twenty years' penal servitude, if they found him. They proved as how he must have been shot from behind, in cold blood."

"And do *you* mean to say," cried Errol, in a tone of horror, "that Fenner was the man who did this?"

Hawkins paused a moment, looked at his master, and nodded significantly.

"I do, sir."

"And *how* do you know? Did you see it?"

"No, indeed, sir, or I shouldn't have been able to hold my tongue. It was in this way: There was a chap of fourteen, my s'ister's eldest boy, and he'd come down to stay some time with my grandmother, being delicate and weakly.

The afternoon of the murder, mother was gone over to Holton (it was just before her last illness, sir), and George, he was up in the woods. I thought that afternoon as I'd stop at home and do a bit of gardening. I was just digging some potatoes, when George came rushing in at the gate and took hold of my arm, and held on to it tight. His face was so white and scared, I thought he was took with a fit, and I got him in my arms and carried him into the cottage.

"What is it, my boy," says I; "what's a-matter, George?"

"Oh, uncle," he says, choking like, and catching hold of my arm still, "there's a man murdered up in the woods."

"A man murdered!" says I; "you don't mean that, my lad?"

"I do," he says, "and it's Tom White, as you was talking to last night."

"And who done it?" I says.

"Mr. Fenner, up at the farm," he answers, white as a sheet.

"Tut, boy," says I, "you don't know what you're saying."

"I do, uncle," says George; "if it was my dying words, it *was* Mr. Fenner. I see him watching there five minutes before Tom White came along, and he was hiding up in the brushwood."

"And did he see you, George?" I asked.

"No," he says, "for when I saw him I hid. I was afeard of him, for he swore at me and drove me out of the farm last week when I was up there. When Tom White came along, I see him raise his gun and point it at his head, and fire. A sort of sickness come over me, and I fell down behind a bush, and I don't remember anything more, only I heard a awful screech. When I come to again I peeped out, and there was voices talking, and then a man went away and got a horse-rug, and they carried him away in that."

"I was terrible oneasy when I heerd this, sir, for I couldn't misdoubt the lad was speaking truth. However, says I to myself, it's no use me turnin' evidence against Fenner, for his mother was powerful good to my poor mother last winter, when she was so bad. They say mur-

der will out, but perhaps, poor chap, he ain't dead after all, and then he'll tell the rights of it. So I says to George:

"Look here, my lad, you take my advice, and don't breathe one word of what you've seen this afternoon to a living soul. It's just as likely as not, if you said you was there, they might accuse you of havin' done it; so keep a still tongue in your head, and it'll be all the better for you."

"Well, George, he was frightened, and held his tongue; but he wouldn't stop no longer in the place, so the next day I sent him home to his mother, which was a load off my mind."

"I never took no notice to a soul of what he told me, and I waited on, thinking White would get round ag'in, and then the truth would come out. But he didn't, and the months went on, and I thought I had best leave it as it was. Besides, I didn't know but what I might get into trouble for sayin' nothin' about it all that time; and George, too, poor chap, was very ill in London, with what the doctor called nervous fever, and I knew it 'ud kill him to be dragged into the witness-box; and so, sir, I kept my own counsel."

"But what on earth could have been Fenner's motives for shooting the gamekeeper?" asked Mr. Hastings.

"Well, sir, happens I know that too, which nobody else did, for White was a friend of mine, and he was tellin' me all about Fenner only the night before. Tom's sister, Sophy White, was a pretty, modest girl, sir, as you'd wish to see, and she'd been brought up to the dress-making. She did a deal of work for the people around, and was often up at old Mrs. Fenner's. It appears Tom Fenner used to make love to her when his mother's back was turned, and she got very fond of him. Well, sir, he promised to marry her, only she wasn't to say a word to no one; and the long and short of it was, she was ruined, sir. Then she begged of him to keep his promise, and he laughed in her face, and asked her if she thought he was going to marry the likes of her. Then when she saw it was no use, she went and told her brother everything. And that very night he met Tom Fenner in the lanes, and thrashed him till he couldn't stand. And he sent his sister off to London, to an aunt he had there; and some time after he told me about it; and I was the only soul as knew it. Fenner, he never

breathed a word; he lay in bed a couple of days, and said he was bad with the rheumatism; so no one knew as he had a grudge against White, and he wasn't suspected for a minute."

"A damned villain!" said Errol, between his teeth, "to seduce the sister first, and then to shoot the brother. And yet you say he bears a good character in the neighborhood?"

"Yes, sir, very good, for you see no one knows a word about either White or his sister."

There was a pause, which lasted for a few minutes. Then Mr. Hastings rose and said:

"Thank you heartily, Hawkins, for putting this fellow in my power. I shall not make use of what you have told me, for your sake, as it might get you into trouble. I can't say I think you have done right in keeping silence about it, but I believe you are an honest man, and that your motive was a good one. Here's my hand on it," and Errol grasped the gamekeeper's horny palm cordially.

Hawkins was confused by such an unexpected condescension from a master he had been accustomed to consider so grand a gentleman, and made his exit as quickly as possible, with very conflicting feelings in his mind.

CHAPTER XVI.

CAUGHT IN THE TOILS.

MR. HASTINGS remained for some time in deep thought. Then he went to the writing-table, and indicted a laconic note to Fenner:

SIR,—Be good enough to call upon me this afternoon at three o'clock. I have to speak to you on important business.

ERROL HASTINGS.

"Hazell Court."

The servant who took the note found Mr. Fenner in the farm-yard. He was a little surprised at seeing one of the Court servants, but when he opened the note an idea suddenly occurred to him, and he indulged in a low, malicious chuckle. The footman was considerably nettled by this unceremonious behavior, and said, sharply:

"Mr. Hastings is waiting for an answer; perhaps you'll have the goodness to give it and look sharp."

Mr. Fenner turned and looked at him, and then apparently his merriment increased.

"Oho! my fine popinjay, so your master's waiting, is he? Well, you see he's not *my* master, so I can afford to let him wait a bit. However you may go back and tell him that very likely I shall turn up this afternoon at the Court, if I've nothing else to do; but I can't say whether it'll be three, or four, or five."

"Ah! you'd better tell him that yourself when you see him, and if he don't kick you from the top of the steps to the bottom, why, my name's not John Clarke, that's all."

And having indulged in this trifling gratification of his spleen, the footman walked off.

"Soho! my girl!" thought Fenner, "that's your game, is it? But you won't make much by that, I can tell you. I suppose you think your grand lover will frighten me a bit perhaps, but you don't know Tom Fenner. If I was his tenant, or held any of his land, that might give him a bit of a handle over me; but you see I don't. I've half a mind to laugh at him, and not go near the place. But that wouldn't be near such fun. He'll be on the stilts first, I expect, and bluster and threaten a bit, and then he'll have to eat humble-pie and sing small; but he won't find one answer better than the other. Ah, my lady, see if I don't pay you out for this, when you're Mrs. Tom Fenner!"

At half-past three, Mr. Fenner, unable to delay his pleasure longer, rang at the door of Hazell Court. It was opened immediately, and he was escorted through the grand hall, along a corridor, and up some steps into Mr. Hastings' private room. Errol was sitting at his writing-table when Fenner entered. He merely looked up and continued his letter. Tom Fenner felt very savage; he would have liked to throw himself with a swagger into one of the chairs, but he did not dare. There was something in Errol's look, and something in his own servile fear of rank, that made him afraid to take a liberty.

Presently Mr. Hastings looked up and said:

"I sent for you to tell you that I object to the way in which you have annoyed Miss Eyre lately, and to request that you will discontinue it."

Tom Fenner felt he was getting very savage.

"And suppose," he remarked, insolently, "that I say I sha'n't, what then?"

"I have no fear of that," replied Hastings, coolly.

"And why?" asked Fenner, in a fury.

"Because I shall induce you, perhaps, to alter your mind."

Fenner was nearly mad with rage.

"Now, look here, my fine cock," he cried, "the sooner you drop this grand tone, the better for you, and for the girl, too. I've made up my mind to marry her, and I will, or I'll brand her name and yours all over the town. Why, I heard every word of your fine offer to her, up in the woods that night, and what she answered you."

"That's a lie," said Errol, coolly; "you never heard a word of it; there was no place near enough to hear, behind which you could have hid your damned spying body."

"Very well; whether it's a lie or not I know it; and knowing what I do, it's not every man would want to have Winifred Eyre for his wife."

Mr. Hastings felt a very strong inclination to knock Fenner's teeth down his lying throat; but the game was in his hands, and he could afford to wait.

"To satisfy myself," he said, "I will tell you the real story. I want Miss Eyre to be my wife, and she has refused me. You are perfectly at liberty to spread that report as much as you please, but I forbid you to say anything else."

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Fenner, insolently, "that's a good joke. But you're not going to gull Tom Fenner that way, my fine fellow, don't think it. I'm going to have that girl for my wife, or else I'm going to tell her father and the neighbors the real state of the case."

"And that is your fixed and unalterable determination?" Errol asked, with an indefinable sneer.

"Yes, that is my fixed and unalterable determination," echoed Fenner, impudently mimicking him.

"Very well," said Mr. Hastings, quietly, rising from his seat, and still keeping his eyes fixed on Fenner, "then I will order my horse, and go round to Mr. Lennox, and tell him you are the scoundrel who shot Tom White, the gamekeeper, in the Holton woods."

Fenner started convulsively; he turned ashen white, and trembled in every limb.

"Oh, my God, sir!" he cried in agony of fear, as soon as he could speak, "don't do that!"

And then all of a sudden he recovered himself, and looked at the man who had confronted him with an air of dogged defiance.

"I didn't know what you meant at the minute," he said, pale to the lips; "I thought it was something else. I don't know anything about Tom White's affairs—that was the poachers' doings."

Mr. Hastings did not answer for the moment, but his eyes were still fixed on Fenner's face. The miserable coward took courage from his opponent's silence, and tried to force a sneer.

"I suppose you thought to trump up some lie against me," he continued; "but a fine gentleman's words isn't quite enough in these days to transport an honest man."

"No," acquiesced Errol, quietly, "it wants proof."

"Yes," echoed Fenner, "it wants proof."

"Shall I give it first to you or the magistrates?" asked Mr. Hastings, coolly.

"I know nothing about it; it's a trumped-up lie. I defy you!" cried the farmer, savagely.

Mr. Hastings kept his temper admirably; he did not even raise his voice.

"Stop a moment," he said. "I have something to tell you; if any of my details are wrong, you can correct me. The gamekeeper White had a very pretty sister called Sophy, who was a seamstress, and worked for your mother."

Fenner started uneasily.

"You promised to marry her," proceeded Errol, coldly, "and under that promise you seduced her. She appealed to you to keep your word, and you laughed in her face. She turned in her misery to her brother, and he met you and thrashed you in the lanes. Is it not so?"

Fenner's teeth chattered, but he did not speak.

"You told no one of your meeting," Errol went on, "but you remained in bed, and said you had an attack of rheumatism. One day when you knew White would pass alone through the Holton Woods, you hid yourself, with your gun, and waited for him."

The wretch was brought to bay at last.

"Have mercy on me, sir!" he gasped almost inarticulately. "I'll do anything you tell me."

"Sit down on that chair, then," said Mr. Hastings, sternly, "and copy what is on that piece of paper."

Fenner walked trembling to the table, and sat down. His hand shook so that he could scarcely hold the pen that was thrust into it. He leaned back for a moment, wiped the cold sweat from his brow, and began:

"I apologize to you, Miss Eyre, for the anxiety and annoyance I have caused you, and I solemnly swear never again from this time to molest or injure you in any way, either by word or deed.

"THOMAS FENNER."

"I have just one word of caution to give you before you go," said Errol, in a quick, rasping tone of contempt. "The wisest thing you can do is to be off from these parts as soon as you can settle your affairs. I am not the only person who knows the cowardly assassin of poor White, and as long as any trace of you is left you are at his mercy and mine. And now, you damned, spying, murderous hound, begone, while I still have power to restrain myself from kicking you out of the house!"

And Fenner, trembling and cringing like a beaten spaniel, went quickly out. Errol returned to his writing-table, and commenced a letter to Winifred Eyre. He had served her now; would she be more disposed to look leniently on his offense, and let her love conquer her womanly pride? "I will at least make the trial before I go," he said to himself, and then he took up his pen and wrote thus:

"I inclose you a note, Miss Eyre, from the man Fenner. You will see by that that he engages to discontinue his annoyance of you; and to leave you for the future free and unmolested. How I have obtained his submission to my desire I need not tell you. I should like to think you would not seek to know. And now, before I leave England on my long voyage, I pray of you to hear, or rather to read, the appeal of my heart to yours. Winifred, I love you with all my soul, with the truest, deepest strength of which passion is capable, and I come to you to decide my future. My happiness, my misery, are in your hands. It is for you to seal my perfect bliss by consenting to become my cherished wife, or to punish a fault born of love, and to

condemn me to a life-long sorrow, by driving me away from the sunshine of your presence. I do not believe that any such inducement will influence you; but remember, my darling, how you have longed for the pleasures of the world. If you will be my wife, they shall all be yours—every wish you have ever formed shall be gratified, if it lies in my power. Do not decide hastily. I shall not leave this for a week, and if your answer is what I scarcely dare to hope it will be, I shall not leave at all. If you can not find it in your gentle, womanly heart to forgive me, I shall go out into the world, and seek to forget the only woman in the world I ever really loved.”

When Winifred broke the seal, and read Errol's letter, her first emotion was one of intense relief, not unmixed with curiosity, at the possible means by which Fenner had been induced to write the words she held in her hand. Then, reading the avowal of Errol's love, for a moment her heart relented to him, and a sad, fond recollection of the handsome hero of her past worship made the tears start into her eyes. Then her quick pride came to the rescue—she tore the letter in atoms, and threw them from her. “I will never forgive him—never!” she cried, passionately; and then she thought what that letter would have been to her if it had come a few days sooner. At first she felt inclined to write a scornful refusal to his offer, but then she reflected that the sting her silence would inflict would be keener, would torture him more by its suspense than any words she might write. By which it will be seen that Winifred felt very bitter and resentful to the man she had but a short time before loved so dearly.

It wanted but one day to the completion of the week, when Arthur Le Marchant rushed into Errol's room.

“My dear Errol,” he exclaimed, “what the deuce is this I hear about your leaving the Court? It surely is not true? You never would be so mad as to start off in your yacht just as partridge-shooting is coming on, and such splendid shooting as you have here, too?”

“My dear fellow,” said Errol, gently, laying his hand on Le Marchant's shoulder—they were great friends—“I can not tell whether I am going or not. You shall know to-morrow. I am waiting for my verdict, and if it is adverse to me I shall go away, and try to forget my trouble.”

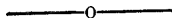
Two days after Errol said to Le Marchant:

"It's all over, and I'm going. Don't ask me any questions, old fellow—I'm hard hit."

And Arthur Le Marchant wrung his friend's hand hard, and kept silence, as men sometimes can when they respect and recognize the presence of a deep trouble.

Before Mr. Hastings left the Court he made his friend promise to play host there in the shooting season during his absence; and on the last day of August he was standing on the deck of his beautiful yacht "*Enone*," looking down into the blue waters of the Mediterranean. His thoughts were full of tenderness to the woman who had scorned him.

"She is right," he said; "but I think, if she had known how I loved her, she would have found it in her heart to forgive me."



PART SECOND.



CHAPTER I.

EXPEDIENCY.

SIR CLAYTON and Lady Grace Farquhar sat at breakfast in their pleasant morning-room at Endon Vale. Lady Grace had poured out the tea, and buttered herself a piece of toast, and then she turned to look at the letters which had just been taken from the post-bag.

"Three for you, my dear," she remarked, handing them over to her husband; "one from your cousin Francis. Open that first; I want to know if he is coming. Only one for me this morning," she continued, taking up a fourth letter; "and I do not know the writing. It bears the Holton post-mark. Who can it be from?" and Lady Grace broke the seal.

"Francis will be here next week," said Sir Clayton, looking up. "He is still in Scotland, grouse-shooting, but he will be here to help us with the partridges, he says."

"And who do you think my correspondent is, Clayton?" asked his wife.

"I can not guess, my dear."

"Mrs. Champion," returned Lady Grace. "This is a most polite note, begging us to drive over to Hurst Manor, and, as the distance is so great, to stay the night."

"Of course you will decline, Grace?"

"Indeed, my dear, I shall do nothing of the sort. The arrangement suits my views exactly."

"My dear Grace, what are you thinking of? You always told me you did not like the Champions, and I have often known you object seriously to staying a night in a strange house, even with intimate friends."

"My dear Clayton, what a memory you have!" exclaimed his wife, laughing. "I am afraid your mind is away with your books. Do you not recollect the project I told you of reconciling old Sir Howard to his pretty granddaughter? Accepting this invitation will give me the very opportunity I desire."

"Ah! Grace," said Sir Clayton, shaking his head, "you never will take my advice, and leave people to settle their own affairs. You are far too philanthropic, and too much philanthropy is as bad as too little. When I write my treatise on Phrenology, I shall introduce some of your unsuccessful meditations and charities, to show the evil results of too much benevolence. Now do you take my advice and leave Sir Howard and his granddaughter alone."

"My dear Clayton, I always try to do good where I can, and the circumstances in which this girl is placed give me a particularly reasonable opportunity for making a good-natured attempt. If I fail in inducing her grandfather to accede to my wishes, I shall take her up all the more warmly myself."

"My dear Grace," interposed her husband, "I know you are sensible and kind, and generally in the right. Still I am by no means sure that should you fail in persuading Sir Howard to notice Miss Eyre you will be acting wisely in asking her here. Remember that she now occupies a humble position, and has never been into any kind of society whatever, and that to introduce her at once amongst girls who have had every advantage will be not only to make her discontented with her own station, but to render her liable to their sneering remarks and undisguised contempt."

"If you once saw Winifred Eyre, Clayton," remarked his wife, "you would not for one moment be under any ap-

prehension as to her giving my other guests an excuse for sneers or contempt. She has an air of breeding that strikes you at once, and a gentle self-possession astonishing in a girl of her age. I am not the least afraid of her being treated with contempt. She is far more likely to be looked on with jealous dread as a dangerous rival. However, I am determined to accept Mrs. Champion's invitation—unless, indeed, you object seriously."

"Not I. If you are bent upon it, we will go by all means."

And so Lady Grace wrote an acceptance.

Sir Clayton Farquhar was a curious compound of qualities. He was a good-natured man in the main, but tiresome and eccentric to a degree. Lady Grace had a weary time with him the last fifteen years, but had been very good and patient; and he was sensible of it, and very fond of her. From the time of their marriage he had been constantly in delicate health, and perpetual anxiety about himself had made him fretful and impatient. He had been fond of traveling, and would insist on moving from place to place, which was a great trial to his wife. Two children that were born to them in the first years of their marriage had died from the effects of long journeys which Sir Clayton insisted on, and they never had any more. Within the last ten years he had taken an entirely new hobby, and become an inveterate scribbler. Not having patience to undertake a work of any length, he dribbled away his energies in writing essays on any and every subject that interested him for the time. He considered himself quite a literary genius, and, as far as his sense of politeness permitted (he was an exceedingly well-bred man), was in the habit of boring every one with quotations from his works, and plans for future treatises. He constantly wrote letters to the "Times," and sent his articles to magazines; and when the former were ignored, and the latter returned, it had not the slightest effect in diminishing his literary ardor. He consoled himself by remarking that there was so much petty jealousy amongst writers that the acrimony and spite with which they regarded a new competitor was not surprising.

Lady Grace had imagined at first that this new *penchant* would afford her considerable relief, but it proved quite otherwise. He insisted upon her reading to him for an

hour regularly every morning, besides searching over all manner of weighty tomes for the quotations or references he required; and as his eyes were at times weak, she was forced to act as his amanuensis, and sit sometimes for hours together, writing at his dictation. Then he always insisted on reading and discussing his compositions with her, so that poor Lady Grace had a weary time of it. But she was so sweet and gentle by nature, so unselfish and kind by long habit and self-control, that she scarcely ever allowed the least sign of impatience to escape her, but devoted herself to his amusement with uncomplaining zeal.

Mrs. Champion's dinner-party was fixed for the twenty-eighth of August. She was very anxious that Lady Grace should accept her invitation, as she was one of the leading persons in the county, and, from her position and aristocratic connection, a very desirable acquaintance. There was another and more important reason still. Lord Harold Erskine was her nephew, and was going to stay at Endon Vale for the shooting. Now Mrs. Champion knew that Lady Grace intended to invite several young ladies to her house during the shooting-season, and she was very anxious that her daughter should be a guest there during Lord Harold's stay. She was sure that Flora had made a decided impression on him, and that a visit in the same house could not fail to complete it. She had suggested to Sir Howard the expediency of paying some attention to Lady Grace Farquhar with this object, and he had unhesitatingly concurred. It was always to her father-in-law that Mrs. Champion confided her matrimonial schemes, for she knew how useless it was to speak to her husband on the subject. Indeed, any topic turning on the advisability of endeavoring to get Flora married, generally ended by putting him into a violent passion.

The evening of the dinner-party came; the guests arrived, and Lady Grace was received with *empressment*, and taken into dinner by Sir Howard. She had always been a great favorite with the baronet since the days of her friendship with the youngest daughter—he had been heard, indeed, to quote her as the type of feminine perfection. She was quite aware of his predilection for her, and on this evening took unusual pains to please him. She had an object in winning him to a happy, pleasant frame of mind. Sir Howard was in a most exceptionally good temper; he chat-

ted away in a cordial, unaffected manner, that was very rare with him, and Lady Grace was patiently and watchfully biding her time. She began to speak of Mr. Hastings.

"Can you throw any light on the sudden and mysterious departure of your neighbor, Mr. Hastings?" she asked.

"Indeed I can not," replied Sir Howard, a slight frown gathering on his brow. "I think he must be mad—coming home for a month or two, furnishing the Court in an almost regal manner, organizing a complete staff of servants, and leading every one to suppose it was his fixed intention to remain in England, and then flitting off in his yacht just before the shooting commences, and giving no reason for his erratic vagaries."

"It seems perfectly unaccountable," acquiesced Lady Grace. "I am so sorry he is gone—he was a great favorite of mine. Sir Howard," she added gently, lowering her voice, "I want to speak to you about another great favorite of mine. Will you listen to me patiently for a few moments?"

"Assuredly," he answered, in some surprise.

"I am going to enter upon a forbidden subject; will you promise not to be annoyed with me, but to hear me out?"

"I promise," returned the baronet, smiling, and not in the least suspecting the unwelcome topic that his guest was about to broach.

"You remember," began Lady Grace, "what dear friends poor Winifred and I used to be."

Sir Howard frowned, and bent his head in silence.

"It would perhaps be impertinent," she continued, "for me to give any opinion as to whether she was treated with undue harshness by her family; I will only say, I have never ceased to regret that I was absent from England, and unable to comfort my dear friend in her subsequent troubles."

She was watching Sir Howard keenly, in expectation of an outbreak; but he was silent; only his brows were sternly knitted.

"The other day," she proceeded, in her low, soft tones, "I paid a visit to my old friend, Madame de Montolieu, and was introduced to a very charming, graceful young girl, who pleased me greatly. I have seen her again to-day, and I love her already. That girl, Sir Howard, was

poor Winifred's child—your granddaughter. Have you ever seen her?"

Sir Howard looked up suddenly, with suppressed anger.

"No!" he answered sternly; "Nor do I wish. Lady Grace, perhaps you are not aware what a painful subject you are touching upon. I beg you to spare me further allusion to it."

"I was in hopes," she said, softly, "I should have induced you to notice this poor child; if you could only see her I am sure you would be proud to own her, she has such a graceful, high-bred manner."

"It is quite out of the question, Lady Grace—do not press me further, I beg you. I am convinced your motive is only kindness, but I can not accede to such a request."

"You mistake, Sir Howard. I have other motives; I will confide the principal one to you, if you give me a moment's attention. You know I have no daughter of my own, and I have often longed to find a young girl who could in some degree stand in place of one to me. When I saw Winifred's child, she seemed to me the ideal of my wishes, and I longed to adopt her as my own. It is very unlikely that her father would consent to such an arrangement, even if I should have courage to propose it; but he promised me this afternoon that she shall pay me a long visit, and I expect her at Endon Vale next week. Now, my dear Sir Howard, I was proposing to myself the pleasure of inviting Miss Champion to make one of my party for a few weeks, the more especially as, I may whisper to you in confidence, my nephew Harold was most urgent in entreating that I would; but of course it is out of the question to have two cousins in my house, one of whom ignores or disdains the other. I can not, for politeness' sake, urge you further, but I shall feel great regret if my interest in your dead daughter's child be the means of bringing estrangement upon our old and sincere friendship."

Lady Grace faltered a little as she uttered the last words.

Sir Howard was touched. There were several feelings working in his mind. If Lady Grace, who held the highest position in the county, wished to notice this girl, who, after all, was as much his granddaughter as Flora, why should he stand in the way? Besides, Lady Grace's last words seemed almost to imply a threat that their acquaintance must drop, if not terminate altogether, in case he still re-

fused to notice her *protégée*, and then the hopes that he and his daughter-in-law had entertained of Lord Harold Erskine's proposing to Flora would be at an end. It was singular the anxiety Sir Howard felt as to his granddaughter's establishment; it seemed almost the one great care of his life. So, after a little deliberation, he determined in his own mind that the best policy would be to comply with his guest's demands; and just a ray of tenderness for the memory of his long-forgotten dead child coming into the hard old heart, he turned to Lady Grace, and made answer:

"You have asked a hard thing of me, Lady Grace—one I have been long and bitterly resolved against; still, for the sake of your old friendship for my dead daughter, I will not refuse you altogether. But mark this: no earthly consideration shall induce me to see or speak with the man Eyre, neither at present do I wish to be brought into contact with the girl. But I shall request Mrs. Champion to call with you and see her, and I shall desire of Flora that, should she meet Miss Eyre at your house, she will behave to her with all courtesy."

"A thousand thanks, my dear Sir Howard," cried Lady Grace, delighted at the success of her mission; "that is all I ask."

At this moment there was a movement among the ladies, and Lady Grace rose.

"Mrs. Champion," she said to her hostess, as they sat together in the drawing-room that evening, "I have just been troubling Sir Howard with a very urgent request, and now I am come to importune you."

Mrs. Champion made up her mind at once that this urgent request related in some way to the expected invitation for Flora, and smiled radiantly as she answered:

"If Sir Howard acceded to it, you may be quite sure of my ready consent."

"I am glad to say that I *was* successful in persuading Sir Howard," Lady Grace replied; "but you have even more power to help me."

"Pray let me know at once what I can do for you, Lady Grace."

"I want to enlist your kind womanly sympathies, Mrs. Champion. I want you to do something that may at first

be a little distasteful to you, but which I am certain you will not afterward repent."

Mrs. Champion was surprised. She could not conceive to what object these words tended, so she gave a silent bow of attention.

"I do not know," Lady Grace proceeded, "whether you have ever heard of the great friendship which subsisted between your poor sister-in-law, Winifred, and myself. I had not the pleasure of knowing you at that time, as you were living in the north with Mr. Champion during the first years of your marriage. I do not wish to pain you by any allusion to her ill-advised marriage. I will only say how deeply I have often grieved that I was abroad at the time, and unable to prove my affection for her when she most needed it. A few weeks ago I met her daughter at the house of my old friend, Madame de Montolieu, and was quite startled by her beauty and extreme air of refinement. Madame de Montolieu, who has educated and been almost a mother to her, speaks of her amiability and talents in the highest terms, so that I have resolved to have her often with me, and give her an opportunity of seeing a class of society which will be far more congenial to her, and for which she is far better fitted than that in which she seems to be placed at present. I have been trying to persuade Sir Howard to recognize her."

"And you succeeded?" exclaimed Mrs. Champion, in blank dismay.

"I hope so."

"May I ask by what means?"

"I was mentioning to Sir Howard how awkward it would be if Miss Champion—whom I hope I shall succeed in inducing to stay with me at Endon Vale—should meet her cousin there, and refuse to notice her. It would, of course, be a personal affront to myself, and I represented to him how easily all these disagreements might be avoided by your all consenting to recognize her."

Mrs. Champion was more ruffled and annoyed than she would have cared to confess. She was most anxious for her daughter to be invited to Endon Vale, and she was perfectly aware that it would be quite out of the question if she refused Lady Grace Farquhar's earnest petition. But at all events she must speak to her father-in-law first. If Mr. Hastings had still been in the country, no earthly consideration

would have induced her to yield; but he was gone, and so perhaps, after all, it did not much matter—a little cold courtesy was all that was demanded. So she turned to her visitor, and said with the best grace she could command:

“My dear Lady Grace, you must not be surprised if I hesitate a little in concurring with your most unexpected demand. I must crave a little leisure to think over my answer; and when I have consulted Sir Howard as to his wishes on the subject, we will talk the matter over again.”

And the conversation dropped.

CHAPTER II.

RECOGNIZED AT LAST.

WHEN all the guests had departed, Sir Howard and his daughter-in-law went to the library for a little conversation.

“Where is Flora?” asked the old gentleman.

“In her room, I suppose. I saw her on the stairs not a minute ago.”

Sir Howard rang the bell.

“Let Miss Champion know I wish to see her at once,” he said to the servant.

“It is a pity to disturb her now,” interposed Mrs. Champion; “I dare say she is tired, poor child.”

The footman remained, apparently awaiting Sir Howard’s decision.

“Go and do as I tell you!” said the baronet, angrily; and the man retired hastily.

Flora came down presently, looking very cross and sulky.

“What do you want with me, grandpapa?”

“Sit down and don’t look so damned ill-tempered, and I’ll tell you.”

But Flora chose to remain standing, and to retain the same expression of face. Mrs. Champion, remarking this, and being very much afraid of a scene between the two, hastened to divert their attention.

“Lady Grace was telling me she had persuaded you to consent to a request she made you. If it is true, I shall almost doubt the evidence of my senses.”

Sir Howard uttered an anathema under his breath, that included Lady Grace and her sex in general.

"You *may* believe them such as they are," he answered, snappishly. A very disagreeable old man in the bosom of his family was Sir Howard.

"You have really consented to recognize this man's Eyre's daughter?"

"What!" cried Flora, in quick, sharp tones—"what do you say, mamma?"

"Are you beginning to doubt the evidence of *your* senses, too?" said her grandfather, with a sneer.

"Not only *mine*, but those of the whole family," returned Flora, quickly.

"Sir Howard, what possible motive could you have for binding yourself to such a promise?" asked her mother.

"Don't you think it possible, Margaret," he remarked, provokingly, "that I may be anxious to put it to the test whether all granddaughters are equally disrespectful and presumptuous?"

"Come, Sir Howard," said Mrs. Champion, soothingly, "let us lay aside this bickering, and talk the matter over seriously."

"Very well," said Sir Howard, dogmatically. "Attend to what I am going to say. With regard to my motive in consenting to Lady Grace Farquhar's wishes—if you bring the senses you were just speaking of to bear upon the matter, you will probably arrive at a tolerably correct conclusion. You want Flora and Lord Harold Erskine to meet, don't you? Well, the only opportunity she will have of doing so this year will be at Endon Vale, and Lady Grace implied pretty plainly that, as she intended to take this Winifred Eyre up, I must either recognize her or our acquaintance must drop. As that would have put an end to your matrimonial schemes, Mrs. Champion, I thought it better to give a partial consent."

"Do you mean to say, mamma," cried Flora, breathlessly, "that Lady Grace Farquhar has invited that creature to stay at Endon Vale?"

"You seem to forget, Miss Champion," remarked her grandfather, mockingly, "that that *creature* is your first cousin?"

"You and mamma may please yourselves," uttered Flora, superbly; "I shall take no notice of her."

"You are a foolish, headstrong girl," cried Sir Howard, angrily; "I am perfectly sick of your silly airs. You will do as I tell you."

"Certainly not in this instance," answered Miss Champion, proudly, sweeping from the room, and leaving the baronet almost choking with passion.

"Do not heed what she says," implored her mother; "she will see things differently in the morning, and will, I can answer for it, comply with my wishes."

"She had better," he cried furiously; "she had better, or by Heaven, I'll drop her altogether, and take up this other girl."

"Now, my dear Sir Howard, pray do not excite yourself, but tell me what you wish me to do."

"I wish you to go with Lady Grace to-morrow, and call upon the girl, and be civil to her; and I insist on your seeing that if Lady Grace invites Flora to stay, she behaves courteously to her cousin, and drops her damned high and mighty airs."

"I must say," remarked Mrs. Champion, "that I do not at all like the idea of going to conciliate this girl, whom we have ignored all her life-time. I do not wish to know anything of her."

"Very well, very well," exclaimed her father-in-law, testily; "do as you like—do as you like; only remember this: you throw away your sole chance with Lord Harold Erskine, and you will only make Lady Grace take up Winifred Eyre all the more warmly. I know Lady Grace well—if she once takes to any one, she stands to them firmly. The probability is, that if the girl makes herself necessary to her, she will introduce her into as good and better society than Flora moves in, and if Miss Eyre is as pretty and clever as Lady Grace describes her, Lord Harold will fall in love with her and perhaps marry her. If you decline to do as I wish, I wash my hands of Flora's love-affairs for the future, and leave you to manage them yourself."

Mrs. Champion saw keenly the force of Sir Howard's remarks, so she made a virtue of necessity, and said graciously:

"My dear Sir Howard, you are perfectly right, as I must confess you always are. I will call on Miss Eyre to-morrow, and I shall talk seriously to Flora about complying with your wishes. Good-night."

"Good-night, Margaret," said the baronet, grimly. "I am glad to see your senses have returned."

The next morning Mrs. Champion rose earlier than usual, and went to her daughter's room.

"Flora, my love!—wake up—I want to talk to you."

"O, mamma! do leave me alone," said Miss Champion, yawning. "I am so tired!"

"Nonsense, Flora! it is quite time you were up; you will only provoke your grandpapa if you are late at breakfast."

"I don't care," returned her daughter. "I hate him. He is a disagreeable, tyrannical old wretch. I wish he was dead—"

"Hush! hush! my dear; you do not know what you are saying. Now, do, for my sake, Flora, try and conciliate him a little, and leave off provoking him, as you have done lately."

"I will not be domineered over by him or any one else," said Flora, sulkily.

"Now, Flora, do be reasonable," interposed her mother. "You ought to have more tact. Sir Howard is easy enough to manage if you only humor him a little, and you know he is very proud of you."

"He worries me to death, mamma. I wish I was married and away from him."

"Then, my dear, if you wish that, I am surprised you act in the way you do. You seem to me to be throwing your chances away."

"What do you mean, mamma? Is it Mr. Hastings you are taunting me with?"

"Taunting? Flora! how can you be so absurd?"

"I suppose I could not help his behaving in the way he did," continued Miss Champion. "I am sure he intended to propose to me. I dare say that artful, designing creature was at the bottom of it all—I hear he was always about with her. Mamma is it really true that Lady Grace Farquhar has invited her to Endon Vale?"

"Perfectly true—she told me so herself. That artful old Frenchwoman has been working on her feelings, I have no doubt."

"But whatever should put such an idea into her head?"

"Well, you know, my dear, twenty years ago Lady Grace and your Aunt Winifred were very great friends, and

it appears she has taken up this absurd philanthropic notion on that account."

"Then I don't care to go to Endon Vale," said Miss Champion, decisively.

"Flora, how foolish you are!" rejoined her mother. "Can you not see that by this opposition you are not preventing Lady Grace's scheme, but furthering it? You are not only losing your own chance of Lord Harold Erskine, but you are giving it up to her."

The last remark seemed to impress Flora very forcibly. She was silent for a minute or two, thinking—then she looked up and said graciously:

"Very well, mamma, I shall do as you and grandpapa wish me. And now please ring the bell for Hawkes; it is time I was getting up."

Immediately after breakfast Mrs. Champion said to her visitor:

"I shall be happy to accompany you to the Farm this morning, Lady Grace, to call upon Miss Eyre."

"Thank you a thousand times, Mrs. Champion," returned Lady Grace. "You are indeed kind. I did not venture to hope for such a speedy compliance with my request. Shall we set off at once?"

"Whenever you please."

"Then I think, if it will not be taking you out too early, I should like to go now, as we start from here at two o'clock."

Mrs. Champion ordered the carriage, and in half an hour it was at the door.

Winifred was gathering roses in the garden as the carriage from the Manor drove up the road. She turned away to the house. She could not bear the contemptuous looks the Champions cast on her as they went by. But then she heard the carriage stop, and she looked back in surprise. The footman was letting down the steps, and Mrs. Champion was descending, followed by Lady Grace Farquhar. What could it mean? The blood rushed to her face, and for a moment she hesitated. Then she went forward.

"You did not expect visitors so early, my dear?" said Lady Grace, kissing her. "Mrs. Champion has come to call upon you."

Mrs. Champion came forward and shook hands with her, and uttered a few polite commonplaces, which put Winifred

at her ease. She had a great deal too much tact to allude to the past—indeed, she behaved precisely as though she and Winifred saw and heard of each other for the first time.

Winifred soon recovered her composure, and invited them to enter the house. Mrs. Champion was struck by the taste and elegance displayed in the miniature drawing-room; and whilst Winifred was talking to Lady Grace, she examined her keenly. And first of all, as women generally do, she noted the wearing apparel. There was nothing to object to. True, the dress was only a print one, but it fitted perfectly, and showed off the little graceful figure to advantage. The tiny embroidered collar and cuffs were faultless, and the waving brown hair was gathered up into rich masses above the small, well-shaped ears. Mrs. Champion was forced to confess to herself that this girl, who had been so long ignored, and so much disdained, was both elegant and pretty, and that her style was unexceptionable. The conviction did not please her at all. She would a thousand times rather have found her connection shy, awkward, and plain. Still, her manner was cordial; she spoke to Winifred very pleasantly and kindly, and the latter was surprised to find how agreeable this great lady, whom she had always thought so proud, could be. As they were taking their leave, Lady Grace said:

“Then remember, my dear, that next Thursday week, at three o’clock, I shall send the carriage for you.”

“Pray do not think of such a thing, Lady Grace,” interposed Mrs. Champion; “you have invited Flora the previous day; let her delay her visit for one day, and my carriage shall take them both.”

Lady Grace assented, and Winifred made her acknowledgments very gracefully. Then her guests departed, and she was left alone, wondering very much at what had befallen her.

“A fortnight ago,” she thought, “and what has happened yesterday and to-day would have been the realization of one of my fondest hopes; and now—now I seem to care nothing for it. To have been recognized by the Champions, to have been invited to stay with a great lady, to be introduced into society, would have been a glimpse of Paradise; and now that I am wretched, and heart-broken, and miserable, all these honors are thrust upon me, and I

do not value them one whit. I shall like to be with that dear, kind Lady Grace, but to the rest I seem perfectly indifferent. Are we never to be happy in this world, but to go on longing keenly after something we think happiness, and when we at last attain to it, to find we have lost the desire for it, and that it gives us no pleasure?"

When Mr. Eyre came in to dinner, and his daughter told him what had happened, he was unfeignedly glad.

"My dear," he said, "I am very pleased, for your sake, that this has occurred. I never cared to be noticed by grand people myself, but it has been the one wish of my life that you should be placed in a better position than I was able to give you."

"Dear papa," said Winifred, leaning over his chair, and kissing him affectionately, "how good you are! Do you know that, although I shall be pleased to stay at Endon Vale, I can not bear the thought of leaving you—I am afraid you will miss me so."

"Do not think of me, my dear. If ever you should fancy, when you are away, that I am dull and lonely without you, and think it your duty to return, remember that my greatest pleasure is to think you are happy and enjoying yourself, and that you are moving amongst people I shall be proud to know my child will be able to claim as acquaintances. And now, my dear, to speak a few words about a matter which is very important to young ladies, and which we men get credit for not thinking enough about. Of course these fine ladies that you are going amongst dress very grandly, and don't like to be seen often in the same clothes. Now, I don't mean you to be put in the shade by their grandeur, so, my dear, I shall give you fifty pounds, to buy suitable things before you go away on your visit;" and Mr. Eyre produced a roll of notes, with which he could not just at that time very well afford to part, but which he was determined should go toward putting his daughter on an equality with the rest of the young lady guests.

"Oh, papa," cried Winifred, "it is a great deal too much; I would rather not take it all."

"It is much more likely, my dear, that you will hardly find it enough," returned her father, smiling; "so take it, and say no more about it. "Your best plan," he continued, "will be to find out a good dress-maker in London, and get Madame de Montolieu to go up to town with you to-mor-

row, and help you in your choice. And I have something more to give you," he added—"something you never heard of before. Come with me, and I will show you," and he went upstairs to his room, followed by Winifred. He took a key from his pocket, unlocked a drawer, and brought from it a large jewel-case. This he opened, and placed before his daughter's wondering eyes. There were a set of rubies and pearls, three handsome bracelets, a diamond locket, some brooches and ear-rings, and several rings.

"There, my dear," he said, putting them into her hands, "these were your mother's; they are yours, now."

The large tear-drops stood in Winifred's eyes. She took the case reverently, for her dead mother's sake; but these jewels, the possession of which would have given her a wild delight so short a time before, had little value to her for their own sake now.

"Papa," she said, sobbing, "you are too good to me."

And her father, thinking her wonderful good fortune had been a little too much for her, kissed her and stroked her head soothingly.

Kind, thoughtful Lady Grace, who never forgot anything, called on Mme. de Montolieu that afternoon, on her way home. After a little conversation, she said, "My dear madame, you know men are not always very thoughtful, and I should not like to think that when Winifred comes to me, she should have cause to feel any mortification at not being so well dressed as my other guests. I would not for the world wound her feelings, or Mr. Eyre's, by offering to present her with anything, so I am puzzled to know how to act. Will you do me a favor?"

"Certainly, Lady Grace, if it is in my power."

"Then will you go to London with her to my dress-maker's, and should her father forget what she stands in need of—and you know, dear madame, as well as I do, how thoughtless men are—will you provide her with some pretty, suitable dresses, and represent them to be a present from yourself?"

"I would rather not do that, dear Lady Grace. I can not bear to practice a deception of any sort."

"But I could not bear to offer her anything of the kind; besides, I do not think she would accept it from me, while she could not refuse anything from you, whom she looks upon as a mother."

So Mme. de Montolieu consented to what, as the reader already knows, she was not called upon to perform. The next morning she and Winifred paid a visit to London, and the result was that a week afterward a very large box arrived at the Farm for Miss Eyre, the contents of which the servant unfolded with wondering and admiring eyes. There were two beautiful dinner-dresses, several elegant muslins, and two or three very stylish morning toilets.

"Lor! miss," said Susan, "what beautiful things, to be sure! Why, whenever in all the world are you a-going to wear them all? I do declare, there's as many things as if you was going to be married, and this was your wedding truss! Well, miss, I wish you joy to wear them, I'm sure," and Susan folded up the dresses reverently, and laid them carefully away in the drawers.

CHAPTER III.

A MAN WITHOUT A FRIEND.

ALL Lady Grace Farquhar's guests had arrived, save one. That one was Winifred Eyre. On the morning of the day on which she and her cousin were to have appeared at Endon Vale, a letter came to Lady Grace, saying that Mme. de Montolieu was seriously ill with an attack of bronchitis, and that until she was sufficiently recovered Winifred could not leave her.

Miss Champion, of course, arrived all the same, and, if the truth must be told, she was very well satisfied with what had occurred. The idea of driving over to Endon Vale with her cousin had been most distasteful to her; and now that she was relieved from that unpleasant necessity, she was radiant, and, as her brother, who accompanied her, remarked, in a most unusually good temper.

The greater part of Lady Grace Farquhar's guests were strangers to her. Those she knew were Lord Harold Erskine, Miss Alton, the Hon. Evelyn Vale and his sister. As the reader will pass some time in the company of the visitors at Endon Vale, it may not be superfluous to enter into a few particulars concerning them. Lord Harold Erskine has already been mentioned; so we will begin with Mr. Francis Clayton, who, from his cousinship to the host, claims priority of mention.

Francis Clayton was a man who would have completely baffled the researches of those estimable people who persistently find good in every one. There was not an amiable trait in his character, nor a kind action of his on record; and yet he passed muster in society, because he possessed a certain degree of manner, and because his income was a very large one. The most consummate toady in London would not have had the effrontery to speak of him as a good fellow. There were plenty of men who dined at his table, laughed at his sayings, and flattered his vanity, but there was not one of them who liked him in his heart. He was ill-tempered, sullen, revengeful, selfish, cowardly, and mean—the most ignoble tendencies of depraved human nature. In appearance he was short, thickset, and awkward, with cold light-blue eyes, light hair, a heavy face, a large, coarse mouth. The teeth ought to have redeemed the lower part of his face from plainness—they were so white, so regular; but they seemed to have quite a contrary effect—to give a still greater repulsiveness to the expression. They were great, white, cruel teeth; and when he spoke, his lips parted wide, and they shone out hard and fierce and glittering. Not a man to charm women, and yet there was many a one who would have been content to ignore his evil qualities, and take him for the sake of his rent-roll. Francis Clayton was thirty-seven, and it was his boast that he had never made any woman an offer of marriage.

“Why should I make an ass of myself in that way?” he said once to a man who suggested to him that it was a pity he did not take a wife. “I can find plenty of better means of spending my income than by giving it to a fine lady to squander on her follies and vanities. Why the devil should I bind myself to one woman, of whom I should get heartily sick in a month, when I can indulge myself with all the pleasing varieties of the sex at half the cost? I suppose,” Mr. Clayton continued, turning on his adviser with a sneer, “that you have more interest in flattering me than most people; but I dare say even you wouldn’t try to persuade me that I was a Bayard, a Crichton, or a Lancelot. No, my good fellow, I’m not a man that women break their hearts about, and I am as well aware of it as my friends. But then, you see, on the other hand, I am not imbued with the chivalrous notions of the sex that some of these

heroes are, or pretend to be. I value a woman as I do a jewel or a horse. Of *course* you can buy them—it only depends on whether you are willing or able to give the price. Take the virtuous Phillis, for instance—offer to show her a little of town life, a brougham, and as many bonnets as she likes, and she has no more hesitation in jilting her Corydon, and leaving him lamenting on the mountains, than—than her new lover has in leaving her when he wearies of her rustic charms—and so on upward. The higher the rank of the fair aspirant, the more she wants; and, unluckily, when you get from the simple stage to the gentle, they want your name too, which of course includes your wealth, your liberty, and the power of having a will of your own, and enjoying the sweets of bachelorhood. I don't think it's in the power of any woman living to entrap Francis Clayton in making her an offer; but I am perfectly certain that if he ever did make such an egregious ass of himself, he would be willing to pay twenty thousand pounds the next day to get out of it."

Sir Clayton Farquhar was not particularly attached to his cousin, but he had been very fond of his uncle, and on that account kept up an intimacy with the son. Besides, Mr. Clayton was as good a shot as he was a bad horseman, and men like to have their game scientifically slaughtered. Lady Grace did not like him, but she treated him with all the more courtesy and kindness on that account, lest by word or look she should be betrayed into disclosing her real feelings toward him. So much for the present of Francis Clayton, whom all through his selfish, ill-spent life, no man or woman had ever really cared for, and whose name no living soul had ever in a moment of affection abbreviated from cold Francis to the more endearing, kindly one of Frank.

Miss Alton had been at Endon Vale some days, and was a great favorite with every one in the house. Her aunt, Lady Marion, was in Ireland, and as she was not particularly attached to her prim old grandfather and grandmother, whom her aunt visited annually, she had been very glad to accept Lady Grace's invitation to stay a month with her. Marion, or Fee Alton, as her fond aunt had christened her, was the prettiest, sprightliest little coquette in the world. Her mother and Lady Marion were twin sisters, and the former having formed an attachment for a hand-

some young captain in the army whom her father would not hear of, ran off with him, and subsequently accompanied him to India with his regiment, where she died. Two years after, her handsome young husband caught a fever, which carried him off in less than a week, and then their two children were sent to England. The elder, a boy, died on the passage home, and the little girl was received with open arms by her aunt as a precious charge from her dearly-beloved sister. Lady Marion was by this time married to a baronet of considerable wealth, but she had no children; and when Sir Marmaduke Alton died, ten years after their marriage, the title went to a younger brother. He was, however, able to leave her a handsome income for her life, and Lady Marion Alton lived in very good style. She was devoted to her niece, who she insisted should take her name; and to prevent any inconvenience from their both having the same Christian name, Lady Marion rechristened her pretty little niece Fee, and a very appropriate name it was.

At the time we write Fee Alton was eighteen, and just through her first season. She was small, but perfectly symmetrical; it was only envy that prompted people to say sometimes she was nothing but an animated wax doll. There was an arch impression in her pretty face that seemed irresistible—a bare pen-and-ink sketch gives the reader no idea of what a charming, bewitching little fairy she was. Still, as it is an important duty toward the fair sex in general to bestow some notice on the landmarks, such as the shade of eyes and hair, we will endeavor to transcribe them faithfully. An abundant mass of wavy golden hair, gray eyes, not large, but full of brightness and vivacity, long penciled eyebrows and eyelashes, several shades darker than her hair, the most piquant of noses, and a full curved mouth, the lips slightly apart, and showing two dainty little rows of pearls—a perfect figure, full and rounded. Everyone admired and liked her, and she liked every one in return. She was the life and soul of a party, with her quick wit and keen sense of the ridiculous; and if she was a little malicious sometimes, it was impossible to be angry with her, she was always so eager to atone for it.

As opposites frequently attract each other, she was at the present time engaged in a desperate flirtation with Colonel Ivers d'Aguilar, a tall, dark, melancholy-looking man (al-

beit decidedly handsome), who was very much in love with her. He had been all through the Indian war, and on his return to England, looking very thin and worn, he was made quite a hero of by all the women, and looked his part extremely well. There was a courteous gentleness in his manner to women that insensibly flattered them; and he was gracefully indolent in a way that the weaker sex admire vastly when they have reason to know that the man who assumes these negligent airs is in truth no carpet-knight, but molded from that sterner stuff of which heroes are made. It was well known what brave, daring acts Colonel d'Aguilar had done in the mutiny; but he never opened his lips to speak of that terrible time himself.

When he first came home, and the women wanted to lionize him and ask him for details, he said, very gravely and courteously:

"Please ask me no questions. If a man who has seen many a battle-field and many a scene of horror without quailing, turns sick with anguish at the recollection of such a time, it would be no story for the hearing of gentle, sensitive women." And they never asked him again.

I suppose that if two men from the opposite poles had been brought together under one roof, they could not have differed more essentially than Colonel d'Aguilar and Mr. Clayton. One was generous in heart and mind, chivalrous to women, irresolute, diffident in himself, and with the courage of a lion: the other—well, we already know what Francis Clayton was. And yet these two men had something in common—a sentiment which in one was a tender, chivalrous affection; in the other, a base, selfish passion. This sentiment was love of Fee Alton. For the first, absolutely the first time in his life, Mr. Clayton was, as he confessed to himself, in love—confoundedly in love with a pretty, little, malicious, teasing, impertinent fairy, and could not help himself. It was in vain he argued that it would be ridiculous for him to run away from her. Had he not invariably got sick of a woman in a month, and was this little doll of a girl to make a more lasting impression? But, argue as he might, it was an undeniable fact that pretty, coquettish little Miss Alton had caught him in her toils, and that she meant to keep him there. Not that she cared for him—on the contrary, she disliked and despised him; but it was something to have a man at her feet whose

indifference to women was proverbial. An additional incentive to Mr. Clayton's attentions was the delight he took in annoying his rival, whom he hated intensely. Mean creatures always fear and hate those they are forced to recognize as something nobler and greater than themselves. Colonel d'Aguilar, in his heart, did not feel the slightest jealousy at his lady-love's flirtation with the rich man. He scorned the idea of a clever, pretty, fascinating creature like fairy Miss Alton caring for such a cold, false-hearted man (he could scarcely bring himself to call him a man) as Francis Clayton; the notion was simply absurd. He thought he knew her too well to believe for an instant that she would sell herself, for his money, to a man whom she could not respect.

"Ah!" he thought, sadly, "I shall never be able to ask her to marry me. How would a luxurious, delicately-nurtured little creature like that bear barrack life with me on eight hundred a year? I would rather die than see her married to such a wretch as Clayton; but I think if some good-hearted, straightforward fellow wanted to marry her, a man who could afford to give her the luxuries she has been accustomed to, I could find it in my heart to say, 'Take her, old fellow, be good to her, and God bless you both!' A man like Vane, for instance. He may not be overburdened with brains, but he is a kind-hearted, brave fellow as ever lived. Extraordinary what different dispositions and temperaments one sees in the same family. That sister of his does not resemble him a bit in the world—as proud and conceited as he is the reverse. Poor fellow, I'm afraid he is very hard hit with that handsome Miss Champion, but she is flying for higher game. Erskine seems greatly *épris* with her. I wonder if it will be a match."

Lady Grace's guests included Mr. Frale, a connection of her husband's, who had recently come into a very good living, but had strong sporting tendencies; Captain Culoden, of the Guards, a very plain, quiet individual, with a good income and considerably less brains; and the Hon. John Fielden, a universal and most accommodating genius, who was always happy to repay hospitality by making himself agreeable, and amusing the company.

These were the people whom Miss Champion found assembled at Endon Vale, and I think her first sensation on

being introduced to them was a slight chagrin at finding no great people amongst them. These were the sort of people she was accustomed to mix with, and she had fully prepared her mind for being presented to a string of duchesses and countesses. But Lady Grace had an intention in inviting her present guests. She had no desire to bring in an element of stiffness or grandness to her party; she wished to have all young people, and to let them enjoy themselves thoroughly without restraint. She was very fond of young people, and liked nothing better than to see them happy and amused.

“My heart is not so old yet,” she was wont to say, “but that I can enter into the pleasures of young folks, and sympathize with their joys and sorrows, and look leniently on their little vanities and jealousies.”

CHAPTER IV.

A LOST LOVE.

LORD HAROLD ERSKINE and Miss Champion had been together five days at Endon Vale, and there was a considerable flirtation, if nothing more, between them. Flora was exceedingly well satisfied with the progress of affairs, and wrote a very pretty, affectionate little note to her mother:

“Everything is *en train*. I am confident of success, and poor Vane is almost frantic with jealousy. Do you remember how annoyed I was when Reginald interrupted us that day I thought the intended proposing to me? I can not feel sufficiently thankful now, for I should most assuredly have accepted him.”

Poor Evelyn Vane was in truth terribly jealous, and as miserable as any woman could desire to see a lover. He was an honorable, straightforward young fellow, a man whose faithful love and friendship were well worth the having, for man or woman. But Lord Harold Erskine was a better match—not only of nobler family, but of considerably greater wealth. Evelyn Vane had nothing now, and would not be a rich man even when his old father died; but Lord Harold had inherited his mother’s fortune, which was considerable, and it was generally believed that his aunt would bequeath her estate to him, as he was the favorite

nephew, and the old lady was very desirous of seeing the handsome property reunited, which had been divided between herself and her only sister on the occasion of the latter's marriage.

Poor Evelyn Vane, then, was breaking his honest heart over a cold, mercenary woman, who had not a grain of affection for him, but had been well content to simulate it before she met with Mr. Hastings, and again when he left England, and she was not sure of meeting Lord Harold until the following season in town. Mr. Vane had really believed she loved him. Had they not ridden and waltzed together until it had been remarked upon? and had she not often, when he pressed her hand and looked into her eyes, answered clasp for clasp and gaze for gaze? Surely the proud Miss Champion would not have acted thus if she had been indifferent to him. He did not give her credit for scheming, nor imagine that her pride was subservient to the occasion. But gradually the notion had been dawning upon him that she preferred Lord Harold's presence to his; and at last he was convinced of it by the open annoyance she betrayed when he interrupted a *tête-à-tête* between them. And Mr. Vane was miserable, because he loved her so dearly. It was not her fault, he argued, if she found now that she loved another man better; her falseness was not intentional. And she was not bound to him by any promise. He had not liked to ask her to be his wife until he was in a position to give her the luxuries she had been accustomed to. If he asked her now, would she not refuse him? It might be that this was only a passing fancy, and that in time she might come to feel for him as she had done before. Then he reminded himself how jealous he had been of Mr. Hastings' attentions to her, and yet that nothing had come of them.

Some women were capricious by nature, and fond of change. They could not help it; was it not the right of beauty to be courted and admired? And so out of his honest, true heart, he made excuses for the woman who had no more compunction in imbittering his youth than she would have had in brushing a troublesome fly from her path. He had been too pertinacious lately. She considered it was all very well for him to display his devotion when it amused her, and there was no one else she cared for; but now it was becoming really too much, and there was even

danger of its interfering with her designs on Lord Harold. Twice the latter had moved away when Mr. Vane approached; it was most annoying; she would put a stop to it. She did not wish to quarrel with him exactly, because she and his sister were such friends. Still Augusta did not care much about her brother, and had never aided his suit in the slightest degree.

So Miss Champion resolved upon taking the very first opportunity of ridding herself of his unwelcome attentions, and the opportunity was not long in presenting itself.

The evening was sultry, unusually warm for September, and some one proposed a walk in the garden. "The very thing," exclaimed all the younger members of the party, and forthwith they separated into groups, and vanished through the long conservatory into the winding garden-paths. Lord Harold and Mr. Vane both approached Miss Champion, but the latter reached her side first, and Lord Harold turned away and joined Miss Vane. Flora was furious. This was the third time Evelyn Vane had had the impertinence to force his undesired attentions on her, and this time his intrusion might checkmate her hopes. It would have been such a glorious opportunity, and now—Flora could have cried with vexation. She remained standing in the conservatory, when all but Mr. Vane had left it, apparently absorbed in the contemplation of a cluster of magnificent gladioli.

"Are you not coming into the garden?" he asked, softly.

"No," she answered, coldly, turning her back upon him.

Evelyn could not fail to see she was annoyed with him.

"I have offended you, Miss Champion. You are angry with me."

"I do not know what right you have to say so, Mr. Vane."

"You were going into the garden, and when I turned to bear you company, you relinquished your intention."

"Then if you know your society is unwelcome, why force it upon me?" Flora said, with stinging emphasis, turning her cold blue eyes upon him.

So bitterly was Evelyn Vane chafed by this cruel speech, that he crushed in his hands a handful of the delicate exotics that stood beside him, and flung them on the ground. Then, ashamed of his impetuous anger, he colored and turned away. Flora looked upon his vexation with exultant feel-

ings. She did not care what she said, so that she prevented him from troubling her in the future.

"Flora," said Evelyn, coming nearer, "dear Flora, in what have I offended you?"

"Mr. Vane," replied Miss Champion, coldly, "I have no reason to assign for my indifference to your presence. A hint so broad as I have been compelled to give you this evening would in general be considered sufficient by a gentleman, and he would not continue to force his presence where it was obviously distasteful."

"Flora!" cried Mr. Vane, in a bitterly pained voice, "do you consider it necessary to speak to me thus? Do you forget how I love you, and how you have loved, or seemed to love me? Because you no longer care for me, are you therefore justified in treating me with scorn, as you have done lately?"

"Really, Mr. Vane, I do not understand what you mean, or how our acquaintance, or friendship, if you will have it so, warrants your speaking to me in this way."

Mr. Vane stood looking at her in bewilderment.

"Miss Champion," he exclaimed, after a pause, "is it possible that you feign to be ignorant of the love I have borne you for years; that you are not aware of my intention to ask you to become my wife, when my position better justifies me in doing so?"

"I feign nothing," returned Flora, haughtily. "If it is true that you care for me, I regret it is impossible for me to return your sentiment in the smallest degree. Pray spare me any further allusion to the subject."

And this was the woman he had loved so tenderly—in whom he had believed so faithfully! Well, perhaps it was a cruel kindness, after all, for the fates to drag the veil so abruptly from his eyes. It lessened the pang her refusal would otherwise have given him.

Evelyn Vane was silent for a moment—then he looked up calmly and steadfastly in the cold, proud face before him, saying:

"A woman may be indifferent to a man's love and regard, but I think the instances are very rare, where, to cure him of his unfortunate passion, she divests herself of the very attributes that have charmed him. Miss Champion, I shall never trouble you again."

And with this speech—the harshest Mr. Vane had ever

in his life uttered to a woman—he turned on his heel and left her. Flora remained standing in the same place, angry and remorseful. Mr. Vane had spoken the truth. A woman, however indifferent she may be to a proffered love, however glad she may be to be free from unwelcome attentions, can scarcely look with complacency on the fact that the accomplishment of her desire has been purchased at the cost of lowering herself in eyes that have been used to worship her. Miss Champion reflected, now it was too late, that it would have been quite as easy to have been gentle and kind, instead of harshly repellent in her manner, and by that means she might have retained her power over Evelyn Vane, whom she might be glad enough to accept some day, if her present scheme failed. To be Lady Lancing of Holton, was, after all, not a position to be despised. She had been foolish and acted unwisely, and such a conviction, to a nature like Miss Champion's, was terribly exasperating.

Her unwelcome reflections were broken in upon by Lord Harold Erskine, who came sauntering leisurely in at the door.

"You here still, Miss Champion?" he exclaimed, in affected surprise. "I thought you were wandering through the labyrinths of the rose-garden."

"I did not care to go alone," Flora answered, pettishly, "and no one seemed anxious for the honor of escorting me."

"Indeed," he answered, "I was about to join you, but a more fortunate aspirant was before me. While you have such a *preux chevalier* as Mr. Vane always ready to anticipate your slightest wish, one scarcely ventures to offer one's services."

This speech was accompanied by a touch of pique, at which Flora was secretly pleased.

"Mr. Vane?" she said. "I fear I am ungrateful for so much consideration on his part; but I must confess to you that his attentions weary me inexpressibly. Indeed, I prefer the monotony of my own company to the tediousness of his."

"Pardon me," said Lord Harold, "if I am indiscreet; but I have been led to believe that you and Mr. Vane are more to each other than ordinary acquaintances."

Miss Champion opened her blue eyes upon him in admirably feigned astonishment.

"You are not serious, Lord Harold?"

"Perfectly so, I assure you."

"Then I trust you will at once divest your mind of such an absurd idea. Evelyn Vane and I are like brother and sister; indeed, I think he would be quite as much amused at the idea of there being anything more between us as I am."

And Miss Champion laughed gayly.

"I am so glad to be assured of that," said Lord Harold, eagerly.

"Are you?" asked Flora, looking languidly upon him; "why?"

"Because I admire you so much myself; because I am bold enough to think you like me a little—because—"

But here the conservatory door opened, and pretty Miss Alton came tripping in, followed by Colonel d'Aguilar and Mr. Clayton.

"Oh, Miss Champion," she cried, "it is so lovely out; how is it that you have not ventured?"

"I was afraid of catching cold," answered Flora, without reflecting.

"Will you not come now?" whispered Lord Harold.

Flora was fain to consent, but for the pretext she had just advanced. However, she was quite willing to be persuaded, so she turned to Mr. Clayton, and said smiling:

"Do you think I might venture, Mr. Clayton—or is it too damp?"

"Decidedly too damp, I should say; there is a very heavy dew falling," answered the gentleman appealed to, with a malicious delight in spoiling sport.

"Then I will be prudent and remain in-doors," said Miss Champion, lightly; but detesting Mr. Clayton in her heart.

Lord Harold was a little annoyed for the moment, but he reflected afterward that it was just as well he had been prevented taking Miss Champion into the garden.

"I should have been sure to propose to her," he thought—"I was just in the humor; and moonlight rambles are awfully conducive to men making fools of themselves. By Jove! how handsome she looked, though—like an empress! I wonder how my old aunt would like her for a niece-in-law? Just the style she admires, I should think. She says a woman ought to be proud and haughty—self-respect be-

gets respect from others. If that's the case, I should say there are few women more thought of than my old aunt;" and Lord Harold turned into the billiard-room for a match with Mr. Frale.

Flora Champion, reviewing the events of the evening in her own room, was highly dissatisfied with them. She could not forgive herself for her conduct to Mr. Vane, not because it had been unkind and ungenerous, but because it was impolitic.

"Suppose, after all, anything should prevent Lord Harold's proposing to me," she thought. "I am certain he would have done so had I gone into the garden with him, and perhaps by this time I might have been his affianced wife. How provoking! I feel as if I hated that ugly, cold-blooded Francis Clayton. I wonder how Miss Alton can tolerate his attentions—he is detestable! I shall not tell mamma about Evelyn Vane—at all events, not at present. She would be sure to go and tell grandpapa, and then he would fly in a passion and rage against me for what he is always declaring is my want of tact."

The next morning at breakfast Lady Grace announced that she had received a letter from Miss Eyre, saying that Mme. de Montolieu was much better—indeed, almost well, and that she hoped to arrive at Endon Vale that afternoon. Mrs. Champion had most kindly promised to drive her over in her carriage, as she wished to call on Lady Grace.

"Who is this Miss Eyre, Miss Champion?" asked Fee Alton; "is she some great friend of yours?"

"She is my cousin," answered Flora, reluctantly, for Lady Grace was watching her.

"Your cousin!" went on Fee; "I do not remember to have seen her when I was staying in your part of the country!"

"She has been living rather in retirement hitherto," interposed the hostess, anxious to spare her guest. "You know she is very young yet—not much more than seventeen; but I hope we shall bring her out a little here."

"Then does your cousin live near the Manor?" asked Lord Harold.

"Yes, not very far distant."

"To think of my being so long at Hazell Court, and not finding out you had a cousin!" he ejaculated. "I am the most curious fellow in the world about people's relations,

and always find out who is connected with whom immediately. Have I ever seen her, Miss Champion?"

Flora hesitated for a moment; then she said quietly:

"I think so—once."

"Will you assist my memory by telling me when and where?"

"We were on Mr. Hastings' drag, going to Holton, and she was in the garden as we passed."

Lord Harold looked up suddenly.

"You don't mean to say it was that lovely girl who you told us was only a farmer's daughter?"

Miss Champion was tolerably gifted with self-possession, but on this occasion it left her completely, and she was scarlet with annoyance and confusion.

Lady Grace saw the awkwardness of her position, and hastened to divert general attention; and her nephew, feeling that he had made an unfortunate speech, seconded her efforts to the best of his ability.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST GLIMPSE OF SOCIETY.

WINIFRED had arrived at Endon Vale, and was sitting in her room, dressed for dinner, until Lady Grace should come in, as she had promised, and take her down-stairs into the drawing-room.

Mrs. Champion had been prevented paying a visit to Lady Grace, as she had intended; but she, nevertheless, fulfilled her promise of sending Winifred in her carriage.

When the latter arrived, she found her kind hostess alone, all her guests being away on an excursion to the neighboring woods. They had spent a pleasant afternoon together, and just as the wheels of the returning carriages were heard, Lady Grace sent her young friend away to dress, promising to call for her on her way to the drawing-room.

Winifred was dressed, and sitting in deep thought in the charming, bay-windowed, chintz-curtained room that had been allotted to her. To say that she was not shy or nervous would be simply absurd. The idea of contact with a new and higher grade of society than she has been accustomed to must of necessity have something formidable in it

to a very young girl. And yet there was something unspeakably pleasant in the thought that she was on the eve of entering into her ardently longed-for fairy-land—society. It was not to her what it would have been before the events of the last month; but still, it was a great pleasure. There was a mixture of anxiety and fear, too, lest she should in any way fall short of the requirements of fashionable life, and commit an awkwardness which fashion would deem criminal. She rose, and looked out of the window, and, standing there, deep in thought, did not hear the gentle tap at the door. Lady Grace entered, and stood for a moment looking at the young girl leaning against the window-frame.

“How graceful she is,” was the thought that crossed her mind. Madame Dentelle has done her figure ample justice, too, in that elegant dress. I shall have no cause to feel ashamed of my *protégée* in any way. My dear,” she said, aloud.

Winifred turned quickly round.

“I did not hear you come in, Lady Grace,” she exclaimed, blushing.

“And yet I knocked. You were, perhaps, indulging in a day-dream. I stood for a moment admiring your dress.”

“Do you like it?” Winifred asked. “I am so glad. I think it beautiful myself; but then, you know, I have seen so few grand dresses, and never had anything like it in my life before.”

“Shall we go down-stairs now, my love?” said Lady Grace, smiling at the ingenuousness of Winifred’s remark; and she left the room, followed by Miss Eyre.

There was no one in the drawing-room but Lord Harold, who came up immediately to be introduced.

“Harold,” said his aunt, “I leave Miss Eyre to your charge until dinner-time, so do your best to amuse her.”

Lord Harold forthwith devoted himself to being agreeable to his new acquaintance, and succeeded perfectly. She felt quite at her ease, and chatted gayly to him. Presently the door at the further end of the room opened, and a magnificent young lady, attired in sweeping lace and silk, entered. The crimson color rushed into Winifred’s cheeks as she recognized her haughty cousin. They had never met since it had been agreed the farmer’s daughter was to be noticed.

“What will she do?” wondered Winifred. “Will she

“speak to me, or will she wait until Lady Grace introduces us?”

A sharp pang of annoyance shot across Flora Champion as she saw Lord Harold bending over her cousin. She had expected to find Winifred awkward and ill-dressed, and here she was, perfectly at her ease, and elegantly dressed. It was in Miss Champion's heart to treat her with slighting disdain, but Lady Grace was there, and she could not forget her good-breeding to gratify her spleen. So she walked straight up to where her cousin was sitting and held out her hand, as though there had never been anything but the most cousinly friendship between them.

“How do you do? Did you have a pleasant drive from Hurst?”

“Delightful,” said Winifred, recovering herself. “Mrs. Champion was kind enough to send me in her carriage, although she was prevented coming herself. She sent a message through me to you that Sir Howard was rather unwell, and she did not like to leave him, but she hopes to drive over early next week.”

“I trust there is nothing serious the matter with grand-papa?” exclaimed Miss Champion, feigning interest.

“Nothing more than a severe cold.”

At this juncture in came pretty Miss Alton, and on Lady Grace introducing her to Miss Eyre, she sat down beside her, and spoke in such a pleasant, winning way, that Winifred thought her the prettiest, sweetest little creature she had ever seen. And then the other guests came in, and were introduced to her in turn; and when dinner was announced, Sir Clayton gave her his arm, and led her into the dining-room. Miss Champion's lip was curled contemptuously, but Winifred was deeply touched by the kind consideration of her amiable hostess. She was a little shy at first with Sir Clayton, but he talked so pleasantly to her, and his manner was so reassuring, that she soon felt at her ease. And then after dinner Miss Alton came and sat beside her, and chatted to her of their afternoon excursion, and the picnic that was arranged for the following day. When the gentlemen came in, Winifred felt no longer shy; she was thoroughly enjoying her first glimpse of the world. Mr. Clayton came up and carried Miss Alton away to the piano, and Lord Harold went over to Miss Champion.

Winifred took the opportunity of looking around at the different faces.

There was a handsome, melancholy-looking man, who attracted her attention in particular. He had come in late, and was the only person who had not been introduced to her. He was sitting alone near the piano, watching Miss Alton, Winifred thought, with a tender, almost sad interest, as she sung her brilliant French *chansonnette*. The little fairy had thrown him her gloves and fan, in that careless, peremptory way women often use to men who they know love them—and he held them gently and reverently. Mr. Clayton frowned as he saw the gesture, then he turned away to the piano and began arranging the music.

When Miss Alton had finished her song she moved back to her place beside Winifred on the sofa. Mr. Clayton walked up to Colonel d'Aguilar.

"I must trouble you for Miss Alton's fan and gloves," he said, nonchalantly.

"I will give them to her myself," Colonel d'Aguilar said coldly, rising.

Mr. Clayton turned away with a scowl, that reminded Winifred painfully of Mr. Fenner.

"Miss Alton," said Colonel d'Aguilar, "have you forgotten that you intrusted your property to my care?"

"Oh! my fan and gloves," she exclaimed, "thank you, I did not remember them; the fact is, I was so anxious to return to my new acquaintance that I forgot you. But I will make amends for my neglect, by sharing my pleasure with you. Miss Eyre—Colonel d'Aguilar." And she made room for him on the sofa beside her, greatly to Mr. Clayton's annoyance, who began to talk to Miss Eyre assiduously, in the hope of mortifying Fee. Winifred did not dislike him so much when he was talking; his conversation was certainly amusing, and he told her a great deal about Parisian society that she found extremely entertaining. It was only now and then, when she remarked the malicious ugly scowl that crossed his face when he glanced toward Miss Alton and Colonel d'Aguilar, that she remembered her instinctive repulsion for him. Presently Miss Champion, who was a brilliant player, sat down to the piano; then Miss Vane sung a bravura song; and, finally, Lady Grace came up and asked Winifred to sing. She acquiesced immediately, although she was trembling in every nerve.

"Shall I send for your music, my love?"

"No, thank you, I always sing without."

Mr. Clayton led her to the piano, and noticed how her little white fingers trembled on the keys.

"Shy," he said to himself, with a sneer; "she'll soon get over that."

Winifred played the prelude softly, and then she began Linley's sweet ballad, "Regret." She was very nervous at first, but gradually her emotion subsided, and she sung in her own sweet, clear tones. Hers was one of those plaintive voices that touch the heart and produce an involuntary emotion of sadness by its pathos. Every one was listening intently, and when she concluded the request for another song was general.

"By Jove!" said Lord Harold to Miss Champion (making use of his favorite exclamation), "how charmingly your cousin sings! That is the kind of voice I admire. I detest the bravura and trill and roulade style; I like the simple, touching singing, that makes one feel as if one had a pleasant kind of sorrow one would like to be sentimental over. Don't you?"

"It is very well for a change," responded Miss Champion coldly.

If Lord Harold had possessed a grain of tact, he would have perceived that Miss Champion was not particularly delighted at his encomiums on her cousin; but he had not, and continued to praise her until Flora could scarcely conceal her impatience.

"It is very well for an untaught person," she said, coldly; "but there is a great want of finish about it."

"Well," replied Lord Harold, "I do not pretend to know much about music, but I would rather sit and hear that sweet voice singing simple ballads than go to the finest opera that was ever composed."

"There is no accounting for tastes," remarked Flora, dryly.

"Do you know," continued Lord Harold, confidentially, "I don't much care about the opera itself? Of course I have my stall there, and all that, and I like lounging about the different boxes, and talking to people I know; and now and then I enjoy a good solo, but for the most part it bores me to death. That everlasting recitative is a perfect nuis-

ance; one is always waiting for the songs one knows, yawning one's life out between."

"I always enjoy the opera," Flora said.

"Oh! of course; I know it's the right thing to do. I always say how charming the music is, and all that; but I thought I might be a little sincere with you, and I find you don't think any the better of me for it."

"Oh, don't say that!" exclaimed Flora, quickly; "in the atmosphere of insincerity which one breathes in society, a genuine man or woman can not be appreciated too highly."

A sop for Cerberus, which he took very kindly.

When Winifred was alone in her room that night, reviewing the events of the evening, she could not fail to be satisfied. She had not experienced the timidity and nervousness that she had anticipated; she was not conscious of having committed any *gaucherie*. Every one had been most kind and considerate to her. Even her proud cousin had treated her with a condescension she never expected. On the whole, it had been very pleasant; and then she sighed deeply and clasped her hands tightly together, while the tears gathered in her eyes. If she had never known Mr. Hastings — if even, having known him, she could forget him now and obliterate all traces of him from her heart—this realization of her dreams would have brought her happiness. "I hate him," she said to herself, bitterly; but it was only the voice of her pride striving against the turbulent spirit in her heart, which uttered, "I love him."

A picnic had been arranged for the following day, and there was a discussion at breakfast as to how they should go. Miss Champion and Miss Vance decided on riding.

"What should you like to do, my dear?" said Lady Grace, turning to Winifred; "will you ride?"

"I have no habit, thank you, Lady Grace," she returned, "and it is so long since I was on horseback, that I fear I should make a very poor figure."

"You can drive, though, can you not?"

"I have had more practice in driving," Winifred answered, diffidently.

"Well, then, you shall drive my ponies."

Winifred colored with pleasure.

"But—but what will you do, Lady Grace?"

"Oh, Sir Clayton shall drive me in his phaeton; he says I never go out with him, and it will be a good opportunity."

"And I may go with her, may I not?" asked Miss Alton; "I do not care to ride to-day."

"Certainly, my dear, if you like."

"Then, Miss Alton," Winifred said quickly, "I hope you will drive. I am sure you have had far more experience than I."

"No, indeed, I assure you," replied Fee. "I ride a great deal, but I know absolutely nothing of driving. I shall feel far safer with you holding the reins."

"Will you take me as groom?" asked Francis Clayton from the other side of the table.

"No, indeed," answered Fee; "I am sure Miss Eyre will do nothing of the sort. She knows nothing of your capabilities yet; and, besides, it will be a delightful opportunity for a little gossip, which is out of the question when a gentleman is present; they always will monopolize the conversation."

"I still appeal to Miss Eyre," said Mr. Clayton; "she has the power to accept or refuse my services."

Winifred was a little perplexed, and looked toward Lady Grace, who answered for her.

"I think it will be better for Evans to go with the pony-carriage to-day; the ponies are a little fresh, and he knows how to manage them if they are troublesome."

The day was lovely. The party started in the highest spirits, and Winifred beyond all was delighted at being allowed to drive the pretty chestnut ponies. Lord Harold Erskine was in attendance as groom, for he had discovered in the morning that his own favorite horse was rather feverish and out of sorts, and not choosing to ride any other, had petitioned his aunt to let him accompany Miss Alton and Winifred. Lady Grace complied immediately. She knew he was a first-rate whip, and had no hesitation in trusting the young ladies to his care.

Winifred's first driving the chestnut ponies was a more venturesome one than she had expected. The animals were rather excitable at first, but she kept them well in hand, and presently they subsided into a tolerably steady trot, although they still pulled a little. They had passed through the carriage drive, out of the lodge gates, down a lane, across the open, purple-heathered common, and they had

just entered a nest of wooded lanes that led to the spot chosen for a picnic. They were within fifty yards of a sharp turning, when a driverless light cart with a runaway horse came tearing furiously toward them.

"I thought," Lord Harold said, describing the scene in the smoking-room that evening, "I thought there was an end to us all. There seemed not a moment for action before the thing would be upon us; but in a second, almost before there was time to think, Miss Eyre pulled her left rein sharply, and we were down in the ditch, and the runaway cart passed us like lightning, with only a graze! But the ponies were frantic by this time. By Jove, how they plunged and reared! Miss Alton screamed, and I jumped down to go to their heads; but, gad! they were off, and I was on my back in the road from the shock. I give you my word of honor I was frightened. I haven't known much about fear since I was a boy and used to get such awful thrashings, but I was downright afraid when I saw those mad ponies off with two fragile, helpless women. I tore after them, but the lanes wound in such a cursed manner, that I could not keep them in sight. I suppose I must have run two miles—it seemed ten to me—when I came suddenly upon them round a corner, standing still in the middle of the road, rather fidgety, with Miss Eyre at their heads soothing and patting them, while Miss Alton was sitting back in the carriage, faint and white with terror. She told me when she had recovered a little that Miss Eyre's presence of mind was astonishing. She guided the ponies safely round the dangerous corners, in spite of their mad pace, and at last managed by degrees to pull them in and get them quiet. But when I spoke to Miss Eyre, I remarked, although she was so quiet and made so light of it, that she was trembling in every limb and scarcely knew how to stand. I love to see a brave woman, by Jove, I do!" finished up Lord Harold, enthusiastically; "and Miss Eyre behaved like a heroine!"

"You don't seem to have rendered much assistance to the distressed damsels," sneered Francis Clayton.

Lord Harold faced round and looked at him for a moment, then he turned away quietly and resumed his cigar.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE LIBRARY.

ONE morning Sir Clayton Farquhar rose from the breakfast-table, as usual, the moment breakfast was finished, and beckoned his wife to follow him. He was longing to be at his literary pursuits.

"I think you must excuse me this morning, my dear," said Lady Grace. "I have a severe headache, and do not feel quite equal to performing my accustomed duties."

Sir Clayton looked annoyed, and left the room without another word.

"Lady Grace," whispered Winifred, with some hesitation, "could I not read to Sir Clayton this morning? Will he be offended if I ask him to let me?"

"I think he will be very much pleased," smiled Lady Grace, approvingly.

"My I go to the library and propose it?"

"Do, my love, if you will."

And so Winifred, timid and shrinking, went to the door of Sir Clayton's study, and knocked very softly. No answer. Another knock, and this time a sharp "Come in!" answered it. Sir Clayton looked up with some surprise at his visitor, who stood blushing and hesitating on the threshold.

"I came to ask if you would allow me to read or write a little for you," she said. "I *have* been used to reading aloud," she added quickly, as he seemed to hesitate.

Sir Clayton was always courteous, so he would not reject an offer dictated by politeness and good feeling.

"You are very kind," he said, smiling. "I shall accept your offer without hesitation. Sit down in this chair, please, and I will find you an occupation. I am at present engaged in a treatise on painting, and require several references to be looked out and read to me." And Sir Clayton pointed to a pile of musty old tomes, which awed Winifred. "My object," he continued, "is to show the negligence and want of care in the present style of painting, as compared with the works of the old masters. It is not surprising the wonderful things they achieved, when we consider the per-

severance and labor and study it cost them. *They* were worthy of the fame and celebrity which have followed them through all these generations, because their objects were noble, and their zeal untiring. They illustrated theology, and their aim was sacred. To paint a beautiful picture of the Virgin Mary was not only to gain fame for themselves, but to inspire their country with a love and admiration for the divine—to elevate worship and give heart to their religion. We Protestants may consider such an aim erroneous, but we can not dispute its nobility; and I contend that unless our great artists of the present day find higher and nobler themes for painting than lovers' partings, dogs, and horses, sheep-shearings, and sunset in the Highlands, their fame, though it may be great in their day, will not be lasting. Nothing can be so suitable to grand paintings as holy subjects; indeed, to be a painter, one ought also to be a Roman Catholic. Painting has at times exercised great influence over religion. In the beginning of the sixteenth century, when so many of the great masters lived, and were famous, there was a greater and more universal excitement on religious topics than there has been in any other period of the world's history. It was then that the great and noble Savonarola lived."

"I like to hear or read of Savonarola," said Winifred; "his character has always seemed such a grand one to me."

"I wrote an essay on Savonarola and his times not long ago," remarked Sir Clayton. "You shall read it if you like. But now to business. Will you copy out a few notes for me?"

Winifred took a sheet of foolscap, dipped her pen in the ink, and commenced.

"The old masters bestowed the greatest pains on their pictures. They first made a variety of sketches, then a finished drawing of the whole, next every separate part, heads, hands, feet, and pieces of drapery; they then painted the picture, and retouched it from the life."

"Oh, Sir Clayton, is that really true?" asked Winifred, looking up. "Did they really take so much pains to produce one picture?"

"Some of them have done more than that," answered the baronet. "Michael Angelo studied anatomy for twelve years. Raphael, in his picture of the Transfiguration, drew first the skeletons of his figures, then the muscles,

and afterward the drapery that covers them. There was a landscape painter in Rome who endeavored to represent every individual leaf on a tree."

"How much I should like to see some of those wonderful pictures!" sighed Winifred; and then the color rushed into her face, as she remembered how Mr. Hastings had spoken to her of them.

"Which do you prefer of all the great masters?" she asked, quickly, to conceal her confusion.

"I think Raphael the greatest painter that ever lived," replied Sir Clayton, "but Michael Angelo has far more disciples and copyists. But the celebrated painters have different attributes for which they are admired. For instance, Raphael has the power of imparting the most heavenly expression to his countenances; so had Perugino and Onorio. There is a legend that Raphael had the art of depicting purity and holiness of expression on his canvas to a degree that was perfectly marvelous, until the time came when he fell in love with the baker's wife; but after his passion for her, although he painted faces that were even more beautiful, he never regained the power of depicting that saintly holiness which had been capable of exciting the devotion of the beholders. Guido and Titians excelled in their flesh tints, and Correggio is famous for his lights and shades. Raphael's great fault was that he copied too exactly from his models. In his celebrated picture of the Dispute of the Sacrament, he painted all his figures wearing the same cap. Annibale Carracci committed the same fault. But Raphael had the true painter's art of ennobling his subjects. For instance, in his cartoons, what a stately and dignified presence he has given to the figures of the Apostles, although they were men without rank, and of mean origin. But," broke off Sir Clayton, "if I talk so much we shall not get on with our work, and I am rather anxious to finish this, as I intend commencing an essay on French authors."

Winifred had been listening with a good deal of interest to Sir Clayton's talk, and would gladly have heard more, but being thus admonished, she hastened to return to her copying. She wrote for an hour without speaking or looking up, and by that time she had finished the task that had been set her. Sir Clayton was busily engaged looking over the musty volumes before him, and making occasional notes

and lines with his pen. He looked up as Winifred laid down her pen.

"I have finished," she said, softly.

"I am excessively indebted to you, Miss Eyre, for your kind services," he said, courteously, rising and coming to look over her shoulder. "I must compliment you on your handwriting," he added. "It is not often I find a young lady's hand so open and legible. It is almost equal to my wife's, and I consider her the best lady writer I ever met with."

Winifred was pleased with this commendation. Like most of her sex she loved to be praised.

"May I do something more for you, Sir Clayton?" she asked.

"Not this morning, my dear, thank you; some day, when Lady Grace has another of her headaches, I shall ask you to come and read a little to me. You must join your young friends at croquet now. I ought to apologize for having detained you so long."

"Indeed," answered Winifred, hastily, "I do not care for croquet this morning. I would much rather stay and write for you—that is," she added, coloring a little, "if I am really of any service to you."

Sir Clayton looked at her kindly.

"I do not often find a young girl willing to leave her companions, and shut herself up with a dry old man and his musty volumes, and that makes me think the more of your amiable self-sacrifice."

"Indeed you miscall it, Sir Clayton," she said. "It is a great pleasure to me to hear and read about the great and clever people of the world; and then, you know, I have been used to a very quiet life, different from the other young ladies here, who have always been accustomed to society and gayety."

Sir Clayton liked this candor and absence of pretense.

"Well, then, my dear," he said, "I hope you will often come to my room and have a chat with me. I dare say I shall be able to amuse you. Come and look at this picture, and tell me what you think of it," he added, crossing the room.

Winifred stood for some moments looking attentively at it.

"Do you recognize the subject?"

“Not quite; but I think it must have something to do with Charles the Second’s Court.”

“Yes, it is a picture I had painted to order—the beaux and belles of Charles’s Court dancing the Coranto. Several of the figures are portraits taken from miniatures I have in my possession.”

“I scarcely know why it is,” Winifred remarked, “but there seems a peculiar fascination about the reign of Charles the Second. People may have been wicked then; but one forgets that, and only remembers how graceful and witty and handsome they were.”

“You share my own opinion,” observed Sir Clayton, reflectively. “I always had a fancy that I should have liked to live in the brilliant times of Charles the Second, and ‘Le Grand Monarque.’ If tradition speaks truly, and the men were as witty and the women as beautiful as it would have us believe, Charles must have had a glorious reign, after his bitter adversities and perilous wanderings. I do not wonder at all London going mad with joy and uproarious license after the sad, solemn reign of the sour-visaged Puritans. The only part of Macaulay’s wonderful history of England that I could not enjoy or appreciate, was his account of the reign of Charles. I dare say he *was* vicious, and dissolute and weak; but I do not wish to be convinced of his shortcomings. I like to think of him as the Merry Monarch, attracting all to him by his kindly grace—the most courteous of fine gentlemen, the merriest of wits, the most genial of hosts, and the lover and encourager of all mad frolics. I picture him to myself hurrying along the Birdcage Walk, with the well-known step that his attendants could scarce keep up with, followed by his spaniels, and accompanied by some of his choice spirits. There were the gay, high-bred Buckhurst, Lord Dover, the handsome, witty Rochester, the elegant Buckingham, play-writing Etherege, and the mad rake Kiligrew; last, not least, the handsome, talented St. Evremond, and De Grammont, the prince of courtiers.”

“Were St. Evremond and De Grammont in England then?” asked Winifred.

“Yes; Louis had banished them both from Paris, and I suppose they thought no other part of the kingdom worth living in, and so came over to England, where they formed

a charming addition to the English court. I doubt if they had cause to repent their banishment."

"De Grammont married an Englishwoman, did he not, Sir Clayton?"

"Yes; La belle Hamilton she was called. I have a picture of her amongst my collection of miniatures. Would you like to see it?"

"Indeed I should!" exclaimed Winifred. "I have often heard of your wonderful cabinet of miniatures, and longed to see them."

"I do not show them to every one," said Sir Clayton, rising and unlocking a massive ebony cabinet, "you shall be one of the privileged few." He placed on the table a large velvet case of miniature portraits, and pointed to one in the left-hand corner.

"That is Belle Hamilton," he said.

"She has a very mournful look," said Winifred, examining the beautiful face attentively.

"Poor thing!" Sir Clayton answered, "she did not lead the happiest life in the world, with her dissolute French husband. He neglected her, and the ladies of Louis' court despised and disliked her for a prude. She was too virtuous for their tastes."

"Who is this lovely creature in the gold-colored robe, Sir Clayton?"

"That is the lovely Hortense, Duchess de Mazzarin, who was once called the most beautiful woman in Europe."

"That was the woman whom St. Evremond loved so devotedly all his life?" said Winifred, interrogatively.

"Yes," replied Sir Clayton. "It is a good thing," he added, reflectively, "that all these wits and beauties preserve their youth and freshness in our memories. We look on these charming portraits of them, and fancy them young forever. I can not bear to think of St. Evremond as a little old man in a black coif, with a hideous wen between his eye-brows, carrying the butter from his own dairy to the old Duchess de Mazzarin in St. James's. I like to remember him as the handsome, blue-eyed young Norman, and his lovely Hortense as the willful, magnificent young queen of hearts."

"That is what I do," said Winifred, hesitating a little. "I like to invest my favorites of past ages with every charm and beauty, and make heroes and heroines of them. Those

times must have been very fascinating; but I suppose people were very wicked then."

"I suppose they were," assented Sir Clayton. "I dare say if we could divest the times of the film of romance that years have thrown over them, and see them in their true light, we should be disgusted by their coarseness and depravity. The graceful and accomplished Buckingham was so wicked that the author of 'Hudibras' said he had studied the whole body of vice. He was a traitor, a murderer, a spendthrift, and worse. His vices and extravagance reduced him to starvation, until he was obliged to sell his splendid collection of pictures to a dealer in Antwerp. You know the abject misery in which he died. I think he felt some remorse for his evil deeds, and not least for the work of that dark winter's morning, when he killed the husband who fought for his wife's honor, while she, Lord Cardigan's infamous daughter, held her lover's horse. But I hate to think of those horrors," Sir Clayton went on; "I would rather remember him as the gallant, daring young cavalier, risking his life and estates for the royal love of the unhappy first Charles. Rochester was a sad scapegrace; but there must have been something irresistible in the sparkling satire that spared no one—not even the Merry Monarch himself. Equally at home with the fine court ladies and the plump city matrons, then amusing himself by practicing on the superstitions of the too credulous time as the assumed quack Bendo; he seemed to extract fun from every source."

And here Sir Clayton broke off suddenly, for the lunch bell rang.

"I had no idea it was so late!" he exclaimed, looking at his watch. "I am afraid I have kept you a long time talking, Miss Eyre."

"I never spent a pleasanter morning," Winifred returned, genuinely. "The time must have flown. I hope you will let me come again some day, Sir Clayton."

"As often as you please, my dear."

And they went in together to lunch.

"What have you been doing all the morning, Miss Eyre?" asked Mr. Clayton, taking a chair beside her.

"I have been in Sir Clayton's study," she answered.

"I am afraid you have been fearfully bored, then," he remarked, in a low tone. "My cousin is a terrible prosy

old fellow, with his essays and treatises—if he can get any one to listen to him.”

“He is very clever, I think,” said Winifred. “I have been most interested in hearing him talk. He has such a pleasant way of telling one things.”

“Ah! I’m afraid your interest will not hold out very long,” continued Francis; “if he once gets hold of you for a listener, he will weary you to death. He is perpetually writing essays, and sending them to the magazines; but they are always returned. He writes innumerable letters to the ‘Times,’ on every subject, which are frequently unnoticed; and dabbles in every kind of literature. He wrote a novel once, and was in a perfect fever, imagining what the ‘Saturday Review’ would say about it; and then, after all, he could not get a publisher to take it. It was too dry and learned, they said, and there was not enough incident in it. I have heard a very good story about his writing a sermon some years ago, and insisting on a clergyman, to whom he had presented a living, preaching it. The parson got into a dreadful trouble about it—his flock were perfectly scandalized at sundry unorthodox opinions contained in it, and a deputation waited on him with a severe expostulation. I never heard the end of it, but I know poor Sir Clayton has never attempted any more sermons.”

Winifred did not smile; she was ill-pleased at hearing her kind host spoken slightly of, and hastened to turn the conversation.

“I suppose you won’t try your hand with the ponies again, Miss Eyre?” said Mr. Clayton, maliciously.

“If Lady Grace permits me, I shall,” Winifred answered, coloring.

CHAPTER VII.

OPINIONS OF THE SMOKING-ROOM.

FLORA CHAMPION was becoming very uneasy, and not without reason. She had feared it from the first, and now there was no possibility of doubting that Lord Harold Erskine was transferring his allegiance from her to her cousin. She detested Winifred as only a woman can hate a rival who supplants her. A stinging innuendo, a point-

ed sarcasm, at times betrayed her feelings, but as a rule she had too much tact to indulge her angry malice. Now and then came an opportunity she could not resist. One day at lunch Lady Grace was speaking of Mr. Hastings.

"I regret so much," she said to Miss Vane, "that we have lost such a charming neighbor as Mr. Hastings promised to be. His sudden departure is a complete mystery to every one."

"We quite thought he intended to live permanently at the Court," answered Miss Vane. "It appears he made the most complete arrangements for doing so. All his horses are still there, and I have not heard of the servants being dismissed. A friend of his is staying there now, playing host to a party of gentlemen. Evelyn was invited over to shoot last week. What reason did he assign for his sudden departure?"

"In a note I received from him a few days before he left, he said he could not as yet accustom himself to a quiet country life, and felt a longing for the excitement of foreign travel. But I can not bring myself to think that was anything more than an excuse, which he thought simple enough to repel further questioning. I wish," Lady Grace continued, turning to Winifred, "that you could have met the gentleman we are speaking of, you would have liked him so much. He is not only singularly handsome, but has a peculiar fascination of manner that renders him a general favorite. Perhaps some day he will return, and I shall have an opportunity of introducing him to you."

Winifred bent down her head in silence. Miss Champion looked up, and a glance of malicious light shot from her cold blue eyes.

"An introduction between such intimate friends would scarcely be necessary," she remarked, in her clear voice, that was heard from one end of the long table to the other. "I should think Miss Eyre and Mr. Hastings would be greatly amused at such a formality, after their rambles in the Hazell woods."

The crimson blood dyed Winifred's cheeks until tears of mortification stood in her eyes. Poor child! she was not yet sufficiently used to the ways of the world to parry such cruel shafts. But Lord Harold stood her friend, "That

was a devilish nasty speech!" he thought; "just like a spiteful woman."

"That was hardly fair of you, Miss Champion," he said, coolly, "to take the words out of your cousin's mouth. I wish Miss Eyre could have heard the flattering speech Hastings made about her once, before a room full of young ladies; they were awfully jealous of it."

One vivid glance of thanks shot from under Winifred's long lashes. Lord Harold, seeing it, was rewarded. Miss Champion noted it too, and was bitterly angered. But she smiled sweetly as she said:

"Miss Eyre will scarcely thank you for your hasty championship. Your words almost seem to accuse me of betraying something she wished to conceal."

And laughing still, she walked to the window, bitterly conscious that she had ruined her last chance with Lord Harold. He crossed over and sat down by Winifred, and began taking in a low voice to her. Every one was beginning to notice the attention he paid her, and to speculate on the result. Lady Grace was by no means ill-pleased at the transfer of his attentions. Winifred was already dear to her, and Miss Champion, as we know, had never been a favorite. Perhaps the person who was least conscious of the admiration she inspired was the girl herself. She put down all his attentions to the score of well-bred kindness, intended—like his aunt's—to make her forget the difference of her position and that of the other guests. Had it been otherwise, and perhaps had she also been possessed of a little more worldly wisdom, she would have evinced less pleasure in his society and conversation. In her simplicity she was as far from imagining Lord Harold would dream of proposing to her as that she would receive an offer from a prince of the blood royal. In truth, Lord Harold was very much fascinated by her. He liked her freshness and simplicity; it was a change from the artificial candor and wary innocence he was accustomed to meet with amongst the women of his own set. The difference between her and them was this—she said what she thought: they affected to say what they thought. And was she not as accomplished as they were? had she not the sweetest voice in the world, and did she not speak French to perfection? And then those sweet brown eyes, so candid and changeful. To win

their loving regard seemed to him a happiness worth almost any sacrifice.

Love affairs were rife at Endon Vale just now. Colonel d'Aguilar and Mr. Clayton were getting to care more for Fee Alton every day, in their separate ways; but then the wide gulf of separation that lay between those ways—one a chivalrous, tender, half-compassionate devotion; the other a cold, base, self-seeking passion; and yet both were classed together under the divine name of love. Fee might pique, and wound, and snub Colonel d'Aguilar as she listed, his feeling for her never changed; but a trifling slight, a coquetish assumption of disdain, would almost turn Francis Clayton's passion to hatred.

He was one of those cowardly, evil-minded men who love to think and speak ill of the weaker sex—to impute degrading motives to even innocent girls, and give false coloring to the simplicity of ignorance. It was a favorite pastime of his to scandalize a woman, however pure she might be, as he sat indolently reclining in an arm-chair puffing leisurely at a Spanish cigarette, and surrounded by a group of men.

Sir Clayton had wished the smokers good-night, and his nephew had betaken himself to his favorite recreation. Colonel d'Aguilar was listening with contemptuous disgust, Lord Harold's eyebrows were slightly elevated, a glow of anger flushed on Evelyn Vane's forehead, and the other men were highly edified and amused. Mr. Clayton had just enunciated the most sweeping argument on honor and virtue as connected with women; and Mr. Vane, unable to repress his feelings, broke in suddenly:

"I do not agree with a word you have said. Any man who is possessed of a true sense of honor and manliness will always believe in the virtue and purity of women, and uphold it. I think the habit men get into of speaking lightly of them can not be too strongly condemned. It is easy enough to blast a fair fame by an innuendo and a shrug of the shoulders, but a world of argument will fail to reinstate it in the world's eyes when scandal has been breathed upon it. Thousands of men amuse themselves by traducing their neighbors' wives and sisters, whose rage would be ungovernable did they but suspect their own women were in turn exposed to like criticism."

There was a moment's pause, during which Mr. Clayton

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There was a moment's pause, during which Mr. Clayton

knocked the ashes from his cigarette, and crossed his legs. He leaned back in his chair with an unpleasant smile, and said slowly:

"There is a popular fallacy that men have a profound belief in the virtue of their own immediate female relatives. With regard to our mothers, we are in general not able to form an opinion of them until they have outgrown the age when women are attractive: for sisters—thank God I never had any!—I presume they are pretty much the same as other girls, only they have the art to conceal it from parents and brothers; and as for wives"—Mr. Clayton paused a moment, and then continued, with a significant smile—"I should advise a man never to give his wife the slightest opportunity for deceiving him, and then to trust her implicitly. If I ever should be fool enough to trust my honor to a woman—and men are sometimes tempted at last to do what they have forsworn all their lives—I don't fancy she will give me much uneasiness. The great secret, I believe, is to keep all her former lovers away, and let her know she is well watched. What is your opinion, Colonel d'Aguilar?"

Ivors d'Aguilar perfectly understood why he was appealed to, but Francis Clayton's words did not anger him; he held the man in too great contempt. So he replied very quietly:

"I think when a man is conscious of being deficient in every quality that can attract or retain the love of a woman, the method you recommend of winning her outward fidelity is likely to be successful. In every other case I should consider it damnably mean!"

Mr. Clayton had certainly met with his match for once. He had intended an insult he thought unanswerable, and it had recoiled on himself.

Lord Harold laughed.

"Right, D'Aguilar; it always augurs badly when men are suspicious of their wives. Of course we can not expect all women to be perfect, when the other sex is teeming with blackguards; but my notion is this: make a woman love you, be tender and generous with her, show her you have implicit faith in her, and then trust her with all your heart."

"Charming illustration of the old proverb, 'Where ignorance is bliss,' etc.!" sneered Francis Clayton.

"By Jove, Clayton!" laughed Lord Harold, mockingly,

"I compliment you on your humility. I have a great deal too good an opinion of myself to fancy my wife would want so much looking after. You seem to think yours would be only too glad of an opportunity to get away from you."

"Talking of that," interposed Captain Culloden, "I suppose you've heard the story of pretty Adelaide Irving, who married that beast Danvers?"

"Do you mean that pretty little creature Lane was so fond of?" asked Mr. Vane.

"Yes; he was engaged to her, you know, when we went out to India; and she would have been true to him, poor little soul, if they hadn't worried her heart out to give him up, because he was poor. Then Danvers proposed to her—a cold, sordid, bad-hearted fellow as ever God's sun shone upon. Well, she accepted him, and when Lane came home he found her married to Danvers, and wretched. Poor fellow! he had come back in such exultant haste to marry her, for his aunt had died unexpectedly, and left him three thousand a year. It was like the story of 'Auld Robin Gray,' only the difference was they hadn't the strength of mind 'to take but one kiss and tear themselves away.' They went on meeting and meeting, until they were more deeply in love than ever; and then he persuaded her to go off with him, thinking Danvers would get a divorce, and they could be married. But Danvers didn't do anything of the kind. Her parents begged him on their knees to let the marriage be annulled, and take away some of the disgrace by letting Lane marry her; but he laughed in their faces. 'No,' he said, 'I want my revenge!' And I hear Lane is away on the Continent, broken-hearted, because she won't live with him; and she's somewhere in the country, dying of consumption."

"And served them right!" hissed Francis Clayton; "Danvers was a sensible man."

"Any one would think you had been jilted yourself, Clayton," said Lord Harold, "you are so bitter against women and their first loves."

"No, thank Heaven!" returned Mr. Clayton, with a sneer; "I have been too wise in my generation for that. I never gave a woman a chance of jilting me, because I never proposed to one. I've never felt the want of a wife. Beauty when unadorned (by the golden circlet) is adorned the most in my eyes. If I do take it into my head to share my name

and possessions with any fair damsel, I haven't much apprehension of being refused—few women would be mad (or let us call it disinterested) enough to decline a man who has thirty thousand a year in land." And with a malicious, defiant glance at Colonel d'Aguilar, Mr. Clayton threw the remains of his cigarette into the grate.

While this conversation was going on in the smoking-room, another was taking place upstairs. Miss Alton had dismissed her maid, and betaken herself to brush her pretty hair in Winifred's room, for whom she had conceived a violent fancy.

"I'm sure you're not tired!" she exclaimed as she was admitted, in answer to her summons; "and I want to have a chat with you."

"No, I am not tired at all," Winifred answered; "and I think there's no time for talking like this, when one has a sort of a guilty feeling that one ought to be in bed."

"Well, then," exclaimed Fee, laughing, and throwing herself into a deep, chintz-covered easy-chair, "let's be prepared to do without our beauty sleep for once, and begin. I am going to call you Winifred, and you must call me Fee—no one ever thinks of saying Marion. Not that I approve of people calling each other by their Christian name as a rule," rattled on the little fairy, "because it leads to familiarity, and familiarity, we are wisely told, breeds contempt. It's the greatest mistake to be too intimate—people are sure to quarrel; but I don't think we shall; so, if you do not mind, let it be Winifred and Fee."

In which arrangement Miss Eyre concurred heartily.

"And now I want to confide in you," continued Fee, "because I am the most miserable creature in the world, and I want advice, and I know you are good and sensible. Don't be offended," she went on, in her quick, droll way; "I don't mean anything disparaging by saying you are sensible. I know it's generally considered an odious trait in young people to be sensible; but you couldn't be anything that was not nice, because you are so pretty and clever."

"And now, what am I to bring my odious trait to bear on?" laughed Winifred.

"I want to talk to you about Colonel d'Aguilar and Mr. Clayton," said Miss Alton, more gravely. "Which do you like the most?"

"You can not ask me such a question seriously!" exclaimed Winifred. "At all events, you can not have any doubt as to my answer."

"Then you don't like Mr. Clayton?"

"Indeed I do not," replied Winifred, earnestly. "I think he is a man without a single—" and then she paused abruptly, remembering that the expression of her real feelings might be unwelcome to her interlocutor.

"Well, why do you stop? A single what?"

"I would rather not say—I was going to speak too hastily. My conclusions may be too abrupt; and in all probability they are ones you would not share."

"Now, Winifred, that is not fair. I want your real candid opinion without ceremony; and if you mean to be my mentor, as I want you, we must have no disguise. You mean Mr. Clayton is not a man to make a woman happy?"

"Not only that, but a man calculated to make a woman very unhappy. I can not pretend to set myself up for a judge of character, but he seems to me a man without a generous impulse—one who would never forgive an injury, or forego an opportunity of revenge."

"I think you are a little hard upon him," said Miss Alton; "perhaps you have some reason for disliking him?"

"No, indeed," returned Winifred, hastily; "he has always treated me with politeness. I have no reason to complain of him in any way, as far as I myself am concerned."

"Then what is it makes you think so badly of him?"

"I can scarcely tell you, it is a *je ne sais quoi* of manner that makes one instinctively shrink from him. He seems to have a cynical disbelief in good, a sneering mistrust of kind actions, that never goes with a good or benevolent nature. 'Self-interest,' he says, 'is the axis upon which human nature turns.' I would rather die ten thousand times over than come to suspect every thought and action of the people I lived with."

"But self-interest does guide one very much in the world," said Fee, seriously. "See here, Winifred, I will be frank with you. For once I will speak the truth, although it is against prudence, and I may regret it afterward. I know what you say of Francis Clayton to be true; I despise him in my heart. I have not a shadow of hope that I shall ever approach to a feeling of love for

him. They say love is grounded on esteem; if it be so, then I ought to hate him, because there is not a single trait in his character that could win my respect. He is malicious—he is cruel—he is revengeful. God help any poor wretch at his mercy or in his power! And yet, knowing all this, it will not hinder me from selling myself to him if he cares to buy me. I think he will. I think if it were only to triumph over Colonel d'Aguilar he would marry me. Winifred, do you know I love that man with all my heart—with all the love of which a poor, vain, frivolous nature like mine is capable; and yet I can not sacrifice society and fashion for his sake. I wonder why all the men who are worth loving are poor?"

"You would give up such a man as Colonel d'Aguilar, and take Mr. Clayton for the sake of his money?"

Fee nodded her head.

"Yes; so would you if you had led my life, and been brought up as I have been. What can I do?" and she stamped her foot impatiently; "I have no money; my aunt has none to give me. Colonel d'Aguilar has only a pittance barely sufficient for himself. Riches, they say, can not give love or happiness; but poverty can take away one and destroy the other. I have no other alternative."

"But, surely, though you can not marry the man you love, you are not compelled to take one you dislike and despise?"

"You do not understand," and Fee shook her pretty head impatiently; "women must marry—it is their vocation; and if they have been accustomed to luxury, and are ambitious, they must marry a man who can satisfy their requirements. Fancy refusing a man with thirty thousand a year!—a lunatic asylum would be the only place for a woman capable of such folly. You have led a sweet, innocent country life, *ma belle*, and are, no doubt, insensible to the attractions of fine houses, and carriages, and jewels, and opera-boxes. So much the better for you. But we poor moths, who have once been dazzled by the light, can not tear ourselves away from its glitter. My blood curdles at the bare thought of taking Francis Clayton for better, for worse; there is something in his cold, cruel light eyes that makes me afraid when I look at him; and yet, I tell you, if he asks me to be his wife, I shall accept him gratefully, and triumph in my success."

There was something in all this Winifred could not understand; she heard the bitter inflection of Miss Alton's voice, and saw the bright drops of impatient scorn gathering in her gray eyes, and she could have cried for sympathy. If to be a woman of the world, and to move in grand society, demanded such a sacrifice as this, she would rather a thousand times remain in her own position. And then she thought of the time when she had been forced to contemplate the idea of marriage with Mr. Fenner, and the shuddering loathing the thought had caused her, and she felt even more sorry for her new friend.

"Dear Miss Alton," she said—"dear Fee, if you will have it so—I beg of you with all my heart to think well before you make up your mind to marry a man like this Mr. Clayton. Think what it must be to spend all the best part of your life with a man you can not love—a man you might perhaps get to hate!"

Fee laughed a little unnatural laugh, and put her fingers to her ears.

"Hush!" she said; "do not talk in that way. I know all you can say. After all, who knows? Mr. Clayton may never do me the honor to propose to me, and then how foolish I shall look! Good-night, *cherie*—kiss me once more. Good-night." And the little fairy tripped off to her own room.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEFEAT.

THE September weather was bright and full of sunshine, and the young guests at Endon Vale made the most of it. They played croquet all the morning, rode all the afternoon, and danced all the evening on those days when the gentlemen were not shooting; and somehow or other those days were very frequent, although the sport was unexceptional. Francis Clayton and Miss Eyre were the only members of the party who did not join in the afternoon's amusement—the former was no horseman, and disliked riding, and Winifred had no habit. The rest were accomplished equestrians. Miss Champion and her brother had brought their own horses, so had Mr. and Miss Vane, Miss Alton, and Lord Harold Erskine; the others were mounted by

their host. Winifred had often felt a pang of chagrin as she watched the gay cavalcade down the park avenue—not envy, or any bitter feeling, only a longing to be one of them. But she always accompanied Lady Grace in her drives with pleased alacrity, that the elderly lady noticed and approved; and being full of kind thoughtfulness for the pleasure and happiness of others, she had secretly sent instructions to the dress-maker to give Winifred's exact measure to the tailor, and to have a dark-blue habit sent down without delay.

One morning Winifred found in her room a brown-paper parcel directed to her, which, on opening, proved to be a riding-habit. A paper in Lady Grace's handwriting was pinned to it, on which "With my kind love" was written. Without a moment's delay Winifred ran to seek her generous hostess, and after some little search found her in the conservatory, picking the dead leaves off the plants, while her nephew dutifully held the basket.

"Oh, Lady Grace!" she exclaimed, "how can I thank you for such a handsome present?"

"Does it fit you, my dear?" her ladyship asked, with a pleased smile.

"I did not wait to try it on; but it is sure to fit."

"Do not be too sanguine, my dear. You had better put it to the proof, and then come down for our approval."

Winifred, no way loath, ran off again, and presently reappeared, looking the most charming figure, in a perfectly fitting dark-blue habit. Lord Harold looked at her in unfeigned admiration, and Winifred, feeling rather shy in her Amazon costume, blushed vividly.

"Now turn round," Lady Grace said, to give her time to recover herself. "I think it is quite a success. And now, my dear, that you are properly equipped, we must have you mounted, and no doubt a few lessons from Mason, my old groom, will make an accomplished horsewoman of you."

Winifred hardly knew how to express her delight. She was commencing a very pretty little speech when Lord Harold broke in:

"Aunt, servants never know anything about teaching ladies to ride; won't you let me undertake Miss Eyre's tuition?"

"Oh, my dear Harold, I should be frightened to death to

trust her with you, if you were on La Fierle. I am sure you would have enough to do to keep her tolerably quiet, without undertaking a pupil."

"Of course, aunt, I should not ride La Fierle if I went with Miss Eyre."

"Not ride La Fierle, Harold! Why, I thought nothing would induce you to mount any other hack."

"I shall ask Sir Clayton to lend me Saladin, and I suppose Miss Eyre will ride your old favorite, Lance. You shall see, aunt, if my pupil won't do me credit."

Lady Grace made no objection. She was perfectly well aware to what such an arrangement tended, and she was too fond of her nephew to encourage an attachment that she did not believe would be for his happiness. She was a keen observer of character, and had narrowly watched her young guest with a view of forming a reliable judgment of her temper and disposition. True, she had received the highest testimony of Winifred's amiable qualities from Mme. de Montolieu, in whose opinion she had great confidence, and she was very favorably disposed toward the child of her dead friend; but she would observe every indication keenly before pronouncing too hastily.

And so, without Winifred being in the least aware of it, Lady Grace watched her continually, and took note of all her varying expressions, and words, and looks. And with the kindly intuition of a tender, unselfish woman, she recognized all the endearing, lovable qualities throbbing in the fresh young heart, and passed tenderly over failings which she knew to well so be incident to the pride, and thoughtlessness, and egotism of youth.

"She is not perfect," Lady Grace said to herself, "but outward perfection is not the symbol of true womanhood. Perfection is cold, and gives one a sense of unrest; but a nature capable of deep, strong feeling, though it may have its passionate outbursts and fitful depressions, will inspire us with a trust and confidence that no doubts can shake." And from her short experience of Winifred she was content to let matters take their chance. If they fell in love with each other, well and good; Harold was straightforward and kind-hearted, and Winifred—ah, Winifred would be a wife for a man to be proud of, although she was only a farmer's daughter.

It was arranged that the first lesson should be given that same afternoon.

"Aunt," said Harold, privately, "I want you to arrange that we shall not go with the rest of the party."

Lady Grace shook her head.

"I can not think of allowing you to go alone, Harold—it would be too pointed."

"But, aunt, you don't understand. It is on Miss Eyre's account. I dare say she may acquit herself very well, but if she should be a little awkward at first, I should not like to see Miss Champion and Miss Vane sneering at her."

Unusually thoughtful for Harold, Lady Grace reflected, but she did not say so.

"I think I can manage it," she said, after a pause. "I will speak to Miss Alton—she is very amiable and fond of Winifred too. I shall propose that the rest of the party start first. Fee, I know, will not mind staying behind, and then you three can mount quietly and go off in a different direction."

"The very thing, aunt—thank you. I like that little Miss Alton; she is so pretty and good-tempered. I hope to Heaven she is not going to have that sulky beast, Clayton;" and off went his lordship to the stables to make arrangements for the ride.

"Well," remarked his groom, to a select circle of listeners, as soon as his master's back was turned, "blow me if I know what's come to my lord. If he hasn't been and horder'd me to put his saddle on Sallydin this afternoon, as I've heard him say many's the time, was a hamblin' old brute, and only fit for a circus."

Which insulting remark Mason, the head groom, happening to overhear, was exceedingly wroth, and said with temper:

"When people wants to borry an 'oss it 'ud be as well to keep a civil tongue in their heads. Otherwiz they mayn't 'appen to get what they wants. Sallydin's got better blood in him, I'll go bail, than your prancing, gibberish-named mare, but you young cock-a-hoops don't know a good 'oss when you sees one. If you'd take a little of the hexperience of others instead o' settin' up yourselves to know so much, you might get somethin' into yer thick heads as is nothin' but a mass o' hignorant conceit." And the old fellow limp-

ed wrathfully away, while the London groom mimicked him to the life, to the delight of his admiring audience.

Four o'clock arrived, and the first detachment prepared to start.

Miss Champion made as many delays as possible; she wanted to see her cousin mount; of course she would make a mess of that—beginners always did; and it would be delightful to see her looking foolish, and Lord Harold annoyed. But Miss Champion might delay as long as she pleased, that gratification was not in store for her. Lord Harold had given most particular orders that their horses should not be brought round until the first party had started. At last they were off, and Winifred, trembling, nervous and impatient, prepared to mount.

"Now, d'Aguilar," cried Lord Harold, "put Miss Alton up, and you two ride down to the gates; we shall join you directly."

Miss Alton sprang like a bird on to her fretting, beautiful little chestnut-mare, Cheveux Dore, and in a moment was curveting down the avenue followed by Colonel d'Aguilar, who, by some singular coincidence, had not been able to be found when the first party went off.

"Now, Miss Eyre, for the first lesson. Your foot, if you please."

Until now, Winifred's only experience of mounting had been standing on a horse-block, and scrambling to her seat as best she could, or being lifted up by the strong arms of a farm-servant.

"Your right hand on the pummel, your left in my hand—so."

The first attempt was—well, not very successful.

"I'm afraid I'm very stupid," she said.

"Now," said Lord Harold, "I mean to take you down again, and put you up until I am satisfied."

And he was as good as his word. Nine times he took her down, until the quiet, good-tempered old bay horse was on the verge of being irritable; and the tenth, Lord Harold declared himself quite satisfied. Then he gathered up the reins, put her fingers properly between them, and mounted Saladin.

"I see you know how to sit," he remarked, as they went at a slow pace down the avenue, after their companions, who

were waiting at the gate. "And now for a canter," Lord Harold said, when they came to the open road.

How thoroughly Winifred enjoyed her ride. The quick motion, the fresh air blowing in her face, and the feeling of security and protection, made her forget everything but the enjoyment of the hour. She gave the rein to her naturally high spirits, and was so gay and brilliant that Lord Harold felt himself more deeply enamored than ever.

"Women are always nicer on horseback," he thought; "but I didn't know Miss Eyre could be improved."

Miss Alton, faithful to Lady Grace's charge, kept close behind them on Cheveux Dore, who was by no means pleased by the soberness of the pace. She did not understand it; her mistress had always given her the rein, and let her take her flying gallop across the soft turf.

"Not to-day, my pet, not to-day," cried the little fairy to her chafing, impatient steed, "we are playing propriety, are we not, Colonel d'Aguilar?"

Her companion turned to her smiling; but there was more sadness than mirth in his smile.

"Do you know, Colonel d'Aguilar," said Fee, lightly, "that you are not half so amusing as you used to be? Is it your pleasure to assume this Mentor-like gravity, or have you some secret sorrow?"

The same smile, a shade sadder, crossed her companion's brow.

"Supposing your last surmise be correct?"

"I do not believe in men's sorrows," answered Miss Alton, with a quick, light laugh, that was not altogether genuine. "They are independent—their own masters. They can choose their lives, and carve out their own paths. If they have trouble, they have a thousand-and-one ways to make them forget it. Those who lead an active life can not be sorrowful; it is only women who sit with idle hands, brooding over fancied troubles."

"One may have vicarious troubles, Miss Alton. It is possible for a man to be sorry for some one he cares for."

"Are people sorry for each other nowadays?" said Miss Alton, in a voice not quite her own. "I thought 'Every one for himself' was the world's motto."

"Why, Miss Alton, what cynical sprite possesses you? Have you, too, begun to disbelieve in your fellow-creatures?"

"No, not I," laughed Fee, "I was only trying whether

a touch of fashionable misanthropy suited me. Tell me, whom are you sorry for?"

"For you."

"For me, Colonel d'Aguilar?" and Fee opened her grey eyes with surprise. "Have you turned Methodist parson during the last twenty-four hours, and are you going to read me a homily on the worn-out theme of vanity?"

"Not quite so bad as that," he smiled; "but I do want to say something to you—something of very grave import to yourself, and to me, because it concerns you." And Colonel d'Aguilar looked down at her tenderly and earnestly. "May I begin, little fairy?"

Fee was a flirt by nature, and then she really liked this man. She bent her head without speaking. There was a slight tremor in her companion's voice when he spoke again.

"If I did not care for you so much, Miss Alton, it might be an impertinence to speak to you as I am doing. I have never ventured on the subject before, but I think you must know what my feeling for you is. I am not going to trouble you with a love story. I know that even if you cared for me in return, my case would be as hopeless. I do not believe in 'love in a cottage' for people who have been used to every luxury. There is no chance of my ever being rich enough to keep you in any approach to the position that is now yours; so, although I love you—God knows how dearly and truly—I shall never ask you to be my wife."

"Am I so mercenary, then?" and Fee flashed one look on him from her bright eyes.

It was very wrong of her to give that look, and that impulsive answer. She knew well enough she would not marry him without money, even if it broke her heart to lose him.

A gleam of hope lighted for a moment in Colonel d'Aguilar's eyes, and then died out again as suddenly. He took the little hand tenderly in his.

"Not mercenary," he said, softly. "Who would imply harsh words to a tender little fairy? But you know fairies must have their gossamer robes, and their midnight revels, and their sparkling jewels, and earthly fairies' gear is somewhat more costly than rose-leaves and dew-drops." At this moment Lord Harold looked round. "Here comes Clay-

ton," he called, "and actually on horseback. He doesn't seem very comfortable."

Miss Alton made a little *moue*.

"Mr. Clayton is everywhere," she said, pettishly. "One can not stir without him."

She had just been on the verge of a very pretty little scene and explanation, and it did not please her to be interrupted.

Mr. Clayton came steadily toward them at a slow trot, his arms and legs sharing the labor very equally. He joined them presently.

"Lady Grace sent me to see whether you were performing your duty of chaperon efficiently, Miss Alton. I am afraid I shall not be able to return a very satisfactory report."

"Isn't there some saying about two being better company than three, Mr. Clayton?" asked Fee innocently. "I have a horror of being a *de trop*—sensitive people always have."

"Some are so happily constituted," interposed Colonel d'Aguilar, "that they do not seem to know when they *are* boring one."

"And some are malicious enough to take a pleasure in interrupting a *tête-à-tête*," added Miss Alton, reflectively. "But as you are so considerate as to relieve me of my responsibility, Mr. Clayton, I shall go and enjoy a good gallop—*au revoir*," and making a sign to Colonel d'Aguilar to follow, she rode gayly off. But Mr. Clayton had no intention of being baffled in that way, and he followed quickly on their heels. Fee threw a glance over her shoulder, and was terribly chagrined to find Francis Clayton twenty yards behind. But a happy thought came to her rescue.

"The park gate!" she whispered to Colonel d'Aguilar, with a triumphant smile. On she cantered till they came to a turning in the road. There was no path but a long green glade with a rickety five-barred gate at the end. Miss Alton made steadily for it.

"You can't go that way!" shouted Francis Clayton, nearly abreast of her. "The gate is locked."

But Fee held on her way, and in a moment Cheveux Dores had cleared the gate, and Fee, pulling her up short, stood still, half turning to look at her companions. Colonel d'Aguilar and Francis Clayton reined in their horses.

"After you!" said the former, a slight mocking smile playing around his mouth.

Francis Clayton was beside himself with rage—almost furious enough to forget his cowardice and try the leap, but not quite. With a bitter oath he turned aside, and in another moment Colonel d'Aguilar and Miss Alton were riding side by side through the long avenue.

Francis Clayton uttered a string of imprecations, as he turned away, that might have filled the breast of a London coster-monger with envy.

"That decides it," he hissed between his teeth. "I'll marry her now, if it's only to revenge myself for her cursed impudence to-day!"

CHAPTER IX.

TRIUMPH.

THE declining sun of early autumn was shedding its warm golden light over the clustering broad-leaved chest-nuts and thick beeches as Ivors d'Aguilar and Marion Alton rode side by side through the park.

"Was it not a capital thought?" she exclaimed, turning her pretty, piquante face to him; but in spite of her gay, *insouciant* laugh, she was conscious of a latent regret for what she had done. Francis Clayton was not the kind of man to play practical jokes upon, and she had noted the evil expression of his face as he turned away.

The stratagem gave Colonel d'Aguilar unmixed satisfaction. He was certainly not given to liking petty revenge; but what man's sense of fairness could stand the test of a trick played by his *inamorata* on his rival?"

"I compliment you on your brilliant maneuver, Miss Alton. But had the vanquished been any one whom I detested less cordially than Mr. Clayton, I could almost have found it in my heart to sympathize with his terrible position, even though I gained so much by it."

"Why do you dislike Mr. Clayton so much?"

"Why, Miss Alton? Do you ask why? Does any one *like* Francis Clayton?—does any one trust him—is he a man to whom any living creature would go for love, friendship, sympathy, or protection? Is he possessed of one germ of honesty or human kindness, or is his nature one that inspires instinctive distrust and dislike? I know, Miss Alton, that speaking thus to you lays me open to the suspicion of

unworthy motives. Of jealousy, perhaps, or envy. But you will believe me when I say that to you, and you only, would I speak my real opinion of that man. What matters it to me that he is false and heartless, a cynic and a coward?—one meets plenty of men one despises in society, and it is always in one's power to avoid them. But I say this of him to you, because it matters everything to me, for your sake, because I believe he wants to make you his wife, and more than anything else in the world I dread such a fate for you. Ah! little fairy, do not misjudge me. Believe me when I swear to you on my honor that I could give you up almost without a pang to a man I trusted and honored to save you from marriage with Francis Clayton. I love you too dearly even to be selfish."

Marion Alton looked up suddenly at him. There were tears, actually tears, in the gray eyes so prone to laughter.

"Colonel d'Aguilar, if you could read my heart, your delusion would be ended. I tell you frankly I am not worthy of you. If you were rich I should—I should have cared for you very much; but I am too well trained to love a poor man!"

The words were uttered in a sharp outbreak of self-reproach. Miss Alton was sorry for them afterward; but the man who loved her did not think one whit the less of her for them.

"I know it is out of the question that you should marry me," he said, quickly; "perhaps it would not be for the happiness of either; at all events, it is as well to think so. What I am most anxious to be assured of is, that you will not consent to be Francis Clayton's wife."

"What makes you think I shall marry him?" Miss Alton asked, evasively. "I have no reason to believe he thinks of me in that way. Does he not always speak bitterly and contemptuously of marriage?"

"Miss Alton, forgive me if I press you still further. If Mr. Clayton asks you to be his wife—and I have not the shadow of a hope but that he will—what will your answer be?"

And Fee, looking up at the handsome, eager face bending down to her, thought she spoke in all sincerity when she said:

"My answer would be, No!"

"Then I am content."

And Colonel d'Aguilar's face brightened perceptibly, and Fee was straightway beaming with smiles. They turned back then, leaped the old gate, and with mutual consent went for a flying gallop over the common.

When Mr. Clayton took Miss Alton into dinner that evening, she prepared herself for a passage of arms. Of course he would be cynical and spiteful, and no doubt have a quiver full of shafts, that would exercise all her ingenuity to parry. But, as it happened, she was mistaken. Francis Clayton showed for once that he could be forgiving—that he was generous enough not to resent an injury. He was agreeable and talkative, laughed at his own discomfiture, and looked ever and anon so softly and tenderly at Fee, that a perceptible change took place in that volatile little fairy's estimate of him.

"How much he has been misjudged!" she thought; "there must be some tender, kindly feeling left in him, some generosity, or he would not so easily have forgiven the trick I played him to-day. I wish now I had not done it." I think this was the most perfect piece of dissimulation Francis Clayton ever practiced. It was not his habit to control his anger or spite; few people cared to offend him, but there was short shrift for those who did, if he had it in his power to be revenged. But this was worth waiting for—this could not be attained without craft, and so Mr. Clayton kept his rage and jealousy down with a strong hand, and was very gentle with the poor little mouse he had set his heart on trapping. Fortune favored him, too; Colonel d'Aguilar was away dining with a friend who lived five miles distant.

It is extraordinary how powerfully a woman may be affected by a touch of gentleness and solicitude from a man naturally cynical and indifferent. Fee did not think she could have liked Mr. Clayton so much; he could not be really bad at heart—nay, there was actually something worthy of liking and respect in this man she had been disposed to condemn. There was no dancing that evening, and Mr. Clayton sat talking to Miss Alton in a low voice in the small dim recess by the conservatory. He led the conversation subtly—he was even eloquent. Luxury, wealth, and position were his theme, and he vindicated them well to ears all too prone to listen. By and by there was a softer

inflection of his voice, to which Fee listened, half exulting, half frightened.

"Do you know, Miss Alton, that you are the only woman I have ever loved—the only one I ever sought to make my wife. I may perhaps seem hard and rough to you, but it is not always the smoothest tongues that are the most sincere. My feelings are very deep—so deep that I could not brook their being scorned or lightly treated. I should never ask for the love of a woman twice. I need not remind you that it is in my power to surround my wife with every luxury and enjoyment that wealth and position can give; that would not influence you, although such matters are by no means unworthy the consideration of a woman of taste and refinement. Will you be my wife, Miss Alton?"

Fee hesitated and trembled. She did not want to give an answer so soon. How could she be false to the promise?—well, it was almost a promise that she had made Colonel d'Aguilar that afternoon—how decide so quickly on a fate that had hitherto seemed such doubtful good?

"Won't you give me a little time to think, Mr. Clayton?"

"No, Miss Alton," Francis said, firmly, "I will not wait your answer longer than to-night. If you stayed six months in the same house with me, you would know no more of me than you do now. I seek to force no woman's inclination; if you feel you can not care for me, let me know the worst at once, and I will school myself to bear the indifference of the only woman I ever loved."

The poor little fairy was caught in the toils; she fluttered piteously against the net, but a strong hand closed tighter and tighter upon it. She must give an answer now—here; if she refused this splendid offer, her chance would be gone forever. And so she consented—hardly, perhaps, with the coy willingness that delights lovers' hearts, but that mattered little to Francis Clayton, so he triumphed. He had taken the right course, and the prize was won, and he looked on the woman he would be bound henceforward to protect and cherish with more of malicious pleasure than the fond triumph of a successful love. Fee went to her room, bewildered and uncomfortable—half exulting, wholly miserable, indignant at her own heartlessness, and yet not unconscious of the promise of a grand future. She tapped at Winifred's door, and when it was opened, she went

quickly in, and, throwing herself down in a chair, burst into tears. Winifred was fairly distressed; great drops welled into her eyes for sympathy.

"Don't cry, dear Fee—what is it?—what ails you?"

It was startling to see the gay *insouciant* little fairy in such a plight.

"Oh, Winifred, I am so miserable—I hate myself!"

Winifred guessed the rest.

"You have *not* consented, Fee?—you are not going to marry Mr. Clayton?"

"Yes, I am."

"Oh, Fee, how could you? you can not like him."

"What is the use of talking like that?" Miss Alton cried, with feverish petulance. "Why don't you congratulate me?—it is a splendid match!"

"I love you, Fee. I can not deceive you. If you do not care for him—and you can not love a man like that—all his money will not make you happy."

"What does a child like you know about happy marriages? Hundreds of girls marry every year for wealth and position, and I suppose it turns out all right. Why, it would be thought sheer madness in my world to reject such an offer. Of course, it's all very well for people in the country who don't care about show and state, to marry the man of their choice, however poor he may be, and live happy ever afterward. They don't want the excitement of the world; it is enough for them to enjoy the mild pleasures of rusticity, and each other's society, which, of course, never palls upon them. Now, Winifred, be candid, if Lord Harold Erskine asked you to marry him, would you say 'No'?"

"Lord Harold is a very different man from Mr. Clayton. But I can not even imagine the position. Lord Harold is most kind, but it is hardly probable he would ever think of asking a farmer's daughter to be his wife."

"Nonsense, Winifred; your humility is nothing but pride. You know Lord Harold is in love with you; you can not be ignorant of a fact that is patent to every one else."

Winifred started up, blushing.

"Do not say that, Fee; you should not, indeed. Lady Grace would not like it. Lord Harold is very kind-hearted, like his aunt, and he tries to keep me from feeling any dif-

ference between myself and the other people here—I never dreamed of anything else.”

“Well, then, little innocent, I should not like to mislead you—time will show. But now, just for a moment, try and fancy it possible that he proposed to you, what would you say?”

“I would say ‘No.’”

“Come, you are deceiving me. You know you are ambitious, and dying to see the world. Lord Harold is rich, good-looking, and very kind; and, let me tell you, to be Lady Harold Erskine is no mean position. Do you really mean you would refuse all that?”

“I would refuse all that, and a hundred-fold more, if I could not love the man who offered it me.”

“You are very young yet, my dear,” said Miss Alton, in a pitying tone, that made the other laugh; “time will no doubt cure you of your old-fashioned country prejudices. You will be treating me next to some delightful maxims on love being grounded on esteem, and riches the root of all evil, and so forth. But now, seriously, Winifred, it is not such a dreadful thing to marry a man you don’t care for. Of course if you lived in the country, and were to be bored with him all day long, it would be the most awful thing conceivable; but you know fashionable wives are not much troubled with their husbands’ company, and can always get away from it.”

“Fee, don’t say such unnatural things,” Winifred exclaimed, with kindling eyes; “what is life worth without some one to love? You can not always drown the voice in your heart—you can not always be satisfied with the comfort the world gives you. You must have some one to love; and what an awful thing it would be to find you cared for some one more than your husband!”

“Awful!” repeated Fee, mockingly, and the tears came back into her bright eyes. “I do care for some one,” she cried, passionately. “I love Colonel d’Aguilar with all the unworthy heart I have, and he loves me. But how *can* I marry him? Winifred, it is impossible; he has no money; he never will have. And I promised him to-day, only to-day, that I would not marry Francis Clayton, and see how I have kept my word!”

“But why do you decide now?” Winifred asked, wonderingly. “You are so much admired, why not wait? You

go out so much, you are sure to have other offers, and you will meet many a better man than Francis Clayton."

"You know nothing about it. One does not have the refusal of thirty thousand a year every day, and Mr. Clayton would not wait. If I had said No, he would never have asked me again. I came to you to be comforted, and you make me more wretched than I was before."

"But, dear Fee, I can not tell you what I do not think. It is wrong of you to marry one man, loving another. You will not be happy. Write to him to-night and tell him the truth."

"Yes, and repent it all the rest of my life," echoed Miss Alton, bitterly. "No, I have given my answer, and I shall abide by it." And she turned angrily away, and left the room.

Winifred went sorrowfully to bed, for she loved the frivolous, worldly little creature dearly.

Mr. Clayton's reflections were tolerably satisfactory, as he smoked his Spanish cigarette after the ladies had retired.

"Though after all," he muttered, "I am not quite sure the game's worth the candle. Of course fellows will laugh at my being caught after all I've said about the 'happy state.' They won't give me credit for being caught 'with intention.' I wish d'Aguilar was here, but I suppose he won't be in until very late."

Just about one o'clock Colonel d'Aguilar came in, in high good-humor and spirits.

"We have had a charming evening," he said, in answer to a question from Captain Culloden. "Some very jolly fellows there, and I was greatly tempted to stay the night, as they asked me. However, as I had said nothing about it to Lady Grace Farquhar, I was afraid of committing a breach of good manners by remaining. Arthur le Marchant had driven over from Hazell Court—a rare good fellow he is too; the very life of a party."

"Did he say anything about Hastings?" inquired Reginald Champion.

"I think he mentioned the name of Hastings. If I recollect rightly, it was something in connection with a yacht in Constantinople."

"I am devilish sorry Hastings took it into his head to leave England," interposed Lord Harold Erskine. "He was one of the nicest, most gentlemanly fellows I ever met

with. He entertained us in a princely way at the Court last month."

"Hastings?" remarked Francis Clayton, interrogatively. "I seem to know the name. By the way, Erskine, was not that the man Miss Champion accused Miss Eyre of being so much in the woods with?"

Lord Harold colored with passion.

"I presume they were only together just as D'Aguilar and Miss Alton might have been in the park this afternoon, when they gave you the slip."

"Ah!" said Francis Clayton, quietly, but with his most disagreeable smile, "I can well afford D'Aguilar his little triumph. 'Let those laugh who win,' is a capital maxim. But you've not congratulated me yet, any of you. It's not too late, though, now. Adams is not gone to bed yet, so I shall take the liberty of sending him to the cellar for a couple of bottles of my worthy cousin's best champagne. You'll all drink happiness to me in my new state, I know," and he rang the bell.

Colonel d'Aguilar grew very pale; the hand that was on the back of his chair trembled.

"What a fool I am!" he thought; "why should I think of such a thing? It was only this afternoon she gave me her promise."

The door opened; Adams came in, followed by a footman with champagne and a tray of fresh glasses.

"This for the corkage," said Mr. Clayton, slipping a couple of sovereigns into the butler's hand.

"Now, gentlemen, will you all wish me happiness with my lovely *fiancée*?"

"With pleasure, if you give us the fair one's name," answered Mr. Vane.

"Miss Alton!" said Francis, with a smile, and a side glance at Colonel d'Aguilar.

The glasses were filled, and all drank unanimously, if not very sympathetically, to the bridegroom-elect—all but one.

"You do not join in the toast, D'Aguilar," said Mr. Clayton, sardonically.

Colonel d'Aguilar rose to his feet, very pale.

"I am no hypocrite," he said quietly, but with a curious ring in his voice. "I can not wish *you* happiness when I

know it entails *her* misery." And amidst a dead silence he left the room.

Before the party assembled at breakfast the following morning he had left Endon Vale.

CHAPTER X.

THE COUSINS.

A NOTE was handed to Lady Grace, as she was dressing, the morning after Winifred's first riding-lesson:

"DEAR LADY GRACE FARQUHAR,—I have to apologize to you for my very abrupt and hasty departure from your hospitable roof. I only heard late last night of Miss Alton's engagement with Mr. Clayton; and I feel that I have scarcely courage to meet, under these circumstances, a lady for whom I entertained a very deep regard. I prefer telling you the plain truth to making a plausible excuse, and I trust to your exceeding kindness to pardon any lack of courtesy in my sudden exodus. Thanking you for my pleasant visit to Endon Vale, and with compliments and excuses to Sir Clayton, believe me, very faithfully yours,

"IVORS D'AGUILAR."

Lady Grace was perplexed, and certainly a little pained, at the contents of this note. She liked Colonel d'Aguilar—she was fond of Fee, and she neither trusted nor liked Francis Clayton.

"I pray God," she said, very earnestly, "that poor little Fee may never repent her choice. I have tried hard to like Francis—to see good in his character; but I can discern no amiable traits under the thick crust of selfishness and cynicism."

It was very rarely that Lady Grace pronounced so harsh a criticism in her gentle heart; she never uttered one aloud. After breakfast she called Fee to her.

"My dear, can you spare me a few minutes?" and Miss Alton, assenting, followed her slowly to her room.

"Do I hear rightly, my love, that I am to have the pleasure before long of claiming you as a connection?"

Lady Grace spoke brightly and cheerfully; she would not let the girl see her real feelings on the subject.

Miss Alton answered reluctantly, the slight color coming and going in her face:

"I have consented to marry Mr. Clayton, Lady Grace. Has he told you?"

"No, dear; I did not hear it from him."

"May I ask from whom, Lady Grace?"

The elder lady handed her Colonel d'Aguilar's note, and turned away while she read it.

Miss Alton read the few lines breathlessly; a vivid color mantled in her cheeks, and she uttered a quick, gasping sigh. Then she commanded herself, with an effort, and handed the note quietly to her hostess.

"I hope you will be happy, my love," Lady Grace said, taking her in her kind arms, and kissing her with a lingering, yearning tenderness. It seemed very sad and piteous to her to see this child in years, yet woman in worldliness, staking the happiness of her existence, her power of loving truly and lawfully all her life, for the pleasant vanities of which she would so soon discover the hollowness. "I think it will be right, my dear," Lady Grace continued, "that nothing shall be considered decisive until we have your aunt's approval. I shall suggest to Francis the propriety of his leaving us for a few days, until we have an answer from Lady Marion; and I shall write to her myself by to-day's post."

"Thank you, Lady Grace; I shall be pleased to do whatever you think fit."

There must have been a sorrow in the poor child's heart—she was not wont to speak so humbly.

Francis Clayton left Endon Vale in the afternoon for London. The following morning a magnificent case of rings arrived for Miss Alton, diamond, ruby, and emerald. Fee forbore to wear them until she received her aunt's consent. Mr. Clayton had not thought it necessary to wait for such a formality; he never doubted Lady Marion's answer for a moment.

Relieved of her lover's presence, Fee soon recovered her gayety; she cried a little in secret for the man she really liked, but she never mentioned him even to Winifred. There was a little constraint at first between the two girls, but it soon wore off.

"When I am married, Winifred," said Fee, "you will come and stay with me, will you not?"

And Winifred answered:

"If you ask me; but you will have forgotten me before then."

"You think then because I am going to marry for money that I am selfish and forgetful, and everything that is bad. I understand your reproach."

"Indeed, dear Fee, I meant no reproach. If I had been accustomed to brilliant society and town pleasure, instead of my own dull country life, I might think as you do."

"No, you would not," Fee answered, with an unwonted touch of sadness; "your feelings are deeper and truer than mine."

Lady Marion Alton answered Lady Grace's letter in person; on such an important occasion she did not wish to be absent from her niece; and she was naturally anxious to see Mr. Clayton. The next day after her arrival, she carried her niece off to London, and from thence they went to pay a visit in Berkshire, where we shall not follow them.

The party at Endon Vale was breaking up. Miss Champion had stayed on, in the hope of winning back Lord Harold to his allegiance; but now that she found each day attracting him more and more to her cousin, she could endure it no longer. The visit to Lady Grace, from which she had anticipated such great results, had been fraught with the most bitter mortification. How intensely she hated her cousin, I leave it to my fair readers to conjecture. Whatever may have been said or written on the subject, we all know pretty well that it is not in human flesh and blood for one woman to be kindly disposed to another who has deprived her of a lover; and when, as in this case, the offense has been repeated (however unintentionally), we may imagine how deeply the wound would rankle in the breast of one so vain and proud as Flora Champion.

The riding-lessons brought her mortifications to a climax. Lord Harold had been out with her cousin every day for the last week, and his attentions to her had been assiduous and unremitting. It would have compensated Flora in some degree if Winifred had been awkward or nervous; but the girl was too radiant with bright health to be the prey of imaginary fears. And she was so graceful and winning, and such an apt pupil. Already the "Professor of Equitation," as Miss Champion mockingly called him, talked of giving her a lesson in leaping.

Mrs. Champion, in answer to a letter from her daughter, had written a note urging her immediate return home, and Flora had joyfully given orders to her maid to have everything in readiness to start on the following morning.

After issuing her instructions, she proceeded to the morning-room to write a letter. She was close to the door, when it opened suddenly, and Lord Howard Erskine brushed past her with traces of very visible emotion on his good-looking face. Miss Champion reopened the door softly, and went in. Her cousin was sitting by the open window, her face buried in her hands, crying bitterly. She did not seem to be aware of a strange presence, for she did not stir, even when Flora moved a chair.

"May one inquire the reason of such violent agitation?" said the latter, at last, in a harsh, unsympathetic voice.

Winifred started and turned round.

"Are Lord Harold's intentions less honorable or less immediate than you had anticipated?"

The speech was quite a random one, made simply with the intention of being disagreeable, but, like many a bow drawn at a venture, it pierced to the joints of the harness. In a moment it flashed across Winifred's excited brain that the shaft was aimed intentionally, and that somehow her cousin was aware of what had passed between herself and Mr. Hastings. She started to her feet, and stood haughtily looking at Flora. Then, with a gesture of passionate pride, she exclaimed:

"There was a time when I thought the greatest happiness that could come to me would be to be owned as your cousin; but now that I know the extent of your spite, your coldness, and your jealousy, I feel the keenest regret that we belong to the same family, lest some such meanness should be lurking in my own heart. I hate you, and my earnest hope is that I may never see you again after to-morrow!" and she rushed from the room before Miss Champion recovered from her surprise.

When Winifred had locked herself in her room, she cried as if her heart would break. But the tears she was shedding now were produced by very alien emotions to those which had caused the outburst in which her cousin had surprised her. We must go back a little for the explanation of that.

Immediately after breakfast she had gone to the morning-

room for a book, and Lord Harold had followed her. He had then and there made a very straightforward and warm declaration of his love for her; and, to tell the truth, she had been much more sorry and frightened than flattered. She had liked Lord Harold so much, he had been so kind to her, but the moment there was a question of marrying him, she recoiled instinctively. No, she did not love him, and she felt the strongest conviction in her heart that she never should. And so, very humbly and truthfully, she told him the truth; but when he begged her to delay her answer, to think over it, to see if time would not change her feelings for him, she shook her head resolutely.

"Time would make no difference," she said, hesitatingly. "I shall always like you. I shall always feel grateful for your kindness, and for the honor you have done me. You would not have me deceive you?" she continued appealingly. "You would not be content to take me without loving you."

"I would make you love me."

"And then if you failed you would hate me. Ah! Lord Harold do not press me any further. I know you are generous."

And then he left her, and she had cried for sorrow at his disappointment for fear of Lady Grace's anger, and, above all, the recollection of the man whose memory she could not drive from her heart. But now the whole current of her feelings was changed. Sorrow and fear were gone, bitter anger and mortification had come in their place. Strange to say, it was not toward her cousin that she felt such keen indignation, but toward Mr. Hastings.

Why was she to suffer always, because a man had once been false and cruel enough to insult her? Had she been unmaidenly, or wanting in self-respect? If it had been her misfortune to be subjected to this shame, was she therefore to be despised for it, to be taunted with it? And then Winifred began to ponder in her mind through what possible channel Miss Champion could have been made aware of such a circumstance. Mr. Hastings would not talk lightly of a woman he had wanted to marry (and he certainly had asked her to be his wife), and then—no! he was not mean—in any case he would not have betrayed her. Fenner dared not, and surely—surely no one else could know. Might she not have been too hasty in imagining that Miss

Champion's words were winged with latent meaning. Once the doubt had arisen in her mind, she could not rest until it was satisfied.

She dried her eyes, smoothed her hair, and went down again to the morning-room. Her cousin was still there, writing and alone. Very pale, and with her breath coming thick and fast, Winifred took a chair exactly in front of Miss Champion.

"Will you be good enough to tell me," she said, as calmly as she could, "why you asked me just now if Lord Harold Erskine's intentions were less honorable or less immediate than I expected?"

Flora raised her haughty blue eyes contemptuously to Winifred's face. The hasty words spoken a few minutes before had thoroughly angered her, and she was resentful. Her answer came in cold, incisive tones:

"I suppose you are hardly aware (though how should you be?) that it betrays a lamentable want of breeding to burst out at a simple remark, in the very violent and offensive manner that you did just now. I hope, if Lady Grace *really* means to take you up, she will inculcate that precept strongly, or you will be about as agreeable an addition to society as an untamed bear let loose in a drawing-room."

Winifred colored painfully at the insolent remark; but she was too anxious to attain her object to resent it.

"I am waiting," she said, slowly, "until you will have the goodness to answer my question."

"I scarcely remember what it was."

"What did you mean when you asked me if Lord Harold Erskine's intentions were less honorable than I expected?"

"Mean! what should I mean? Really, Miss Eyre, if I were prone to be suspicious, I might fancy all manner of things from your strange agitation at my idle question."

"Then it was an idle question?"

"Oh, pray let this cross-questioning cease!" exclaimed Flora, impatiently. "My letter is of some importance, and I shall be glad to be allowed to finish it."

"Certainly," assented Winifred, and withdrew immediately, much lighter of heart than when she entered. She felt quite sure that her cousin knew nothing about her painful secret. How thankful she was that she had had

the courage to satisfy her fears! But she had another very disagreeable task to perform. It was, she felt, incumbent on her to tell her kind hostess what had passed between her and Lord Harold, and then leave Endon Vale. Perhaps Lady Grace might consider a slight had been put on her nephew, and might never take any notice of her again. Then all her grand hopes and dreams would be at an end. "I suppose I am never to be happy or fortunate any more; everything I long for is to be taken away from me!" she thought, wearily and petulantly; and then she went to seek Lady Grace. Lady Grace was in her own little sanctum, reading.

"Come in," she said, in answer to Winifred's knock, and the girl went in and shut the door.

Lady Grace looked up and smiled kindly, and then she looked again. Winifred did not seem bright and beaming as was her wont—she was nervous, and there were tear-stains on her face.

"What is it, my love? You have been crying!" There was such tender solicitude in the tone, that it was too much for the girl's overstrung nerves, and the tears came thick and fast.

"Oh, Lady Grace, I am so grieved!"

"Grieved, my child? You have not had bad news from home?"

"Oh, no, not that; but I am so afraid you will be angry with me and never forgive me."

"My love, I do not understand you. Why should I be angry? Have you been breaking all my old china?" and her ladyship smiled encouragingly.

"It is about Lord Harold Erskine," Winifred said, nervously, and a sudden chill came into the heart of the elder lady, for she was very fond of her nephew.

"About Harold, my dear?"

"Lord Harold asked—asked me to marry him this morning, and, oh, Lady Grace, I am so sorry."

"Sorry that he asked you to marry him?"

"Because—indeed, Lady Grace; I never dreamed of such a thing—I thought his position made him so far beyond me. I thought he was kind to me, just from generous-mindedness, like you, that I might not feel strange at coming into society I was not used to."

"Then you do not love him?"

"I do like him very much—I could not help it, he is so good—but, oh, dear Lady Grace, I *could* not marry him," and the tears rained down.

Lady Grace would not have been a woman if she had not felt a little annoyed at her favorite Harold's rejection, even though she might not have desired the match very ardently.

"Then you have refused him?"

"I told him the truth—I could not deceive him."

And then all of a sudden it flashed on Lady Grace Farquhar's mind that there was something noble and high-minded in this girl's refusing such a position and such wealth, because she did not love the man. A more worldly-minded woman would have held such romantic folly in contempt, and thought the girl a fool for her pains; but not so Lady Grace. Still there was a momentary struggle in her heart, before she rose from her seat and kissed Winifred.

"My love," she said, sweetly, "I think you have done quite right, if you feel sure in your own mind that you can not love him. But *are* you quite sure? Harold is kind and good; he is handsome, and he is rich—ought you not to weigh everything in your mind thoroughly before you decide?"

"I like him, I respect him, but I do not love him—I *can* not marry him!" concluded Winifred, piteously.

"Very well, my dear, I will say no more. I am sorry, for my boy's sake, and I should have been well content to have you for a niece."

And then the kind-hearted woman took the sobbing girl in her arms, and Winifred laid her head on the kind breast, and cried to her heart's content. There was a good deal more talk before the two parted, and it was settled that Winifred should go home the next day but one, and stay there a few weeks; and then she should pay Endon Vale another visit, when Lord Harold should have left. But Lord Harold left that very day, after seeing and confiding in his aunt. His parting words were:

"Aunt, do you think there is any hope that she will ever come to care for me?"

Lady Grace kissed his forehead, and stroked his head very tenderly.

"I can not tell my boy, but I am afraid not."

CHAPTER XL

AN ANGRY WOMAN.

LADY GRACE pressed Winifred to stay, but she would not be persuaded.

"It is very kind of you to ask me," she said, "but I am afraid papa will be missing me. I have been here more than three weeks, and I never was away from him so long before. You know, Lady Grace, he has no one but me."

And so, on the second day after, Winifred returned home in Lady Grace's carriage. Her father was at home, awaiting her arrival, and it did the poor little heart good to see the kind, fond face again, and hear the tone of heart-felt welcome.

"You're not quite so rosy as when you left, though, dear. I'm afraid the life of grand folks doesn't suit my little country primrose. Let's hear all about it, and how you enjoyed yourself. I suppose you never were so happy in all your life before?"

"Oh, papa, I did enjoy it all so much, and Lady Grace was so good to me, you can't think. I do love her so—I often used to wish she was my mother."

"And did you wish Sir Clayton was your father, instead of the poor old farmer?"

"Oh, papa, how can you say such a thing? I wouldn't change you for a duke!"

"That's right, dear—I'm glad your new friends haven't made you look down upon me."

"Now, papa," exclaimed Winifred, "if you talk in that way, I won't tell you a single thing."

"And how do you like your cousin? Did she behave well to you?"

"She's a disagreeable, jealous creature, and I can't bear her. She was always saying spiteful things."

"And the rest of the people—were they kind to you—did they treat you as an equal?"

"Oh, yes, every one else was most kind; they seemed determined I should not feel any awkwardness. And as for Sir Clayton and Lady Grace, if I had been their own child they could not have been kinder. And do you know,

papa, Sir Clayton used often to take me in to dinner—more often than the others. And, papa,” continued Winifred, blushing, “I suppose I ought to tell you, but I shouldn’t like any one else to know—Lord Harold Erskine, Lady Grace’s nephew, asked me to marry him.”

Mr. Eyre looked up with a glad, proud smile.

“Well, dear, and what did you say?”

“I said ‘No.’”

Mr. Eyre’s face fell a little.

“Did you dislike him? Was he not young?”

“Oh, yes, he was young, and I liked him very much; he was so kind to me.”

“Then why did you refuse him, child?”

“I did not love him, papa,” she said, simply.

“I am very sorry, Winifred,” her father said, presently; “you should have thought it over gravely. You will never, as long as you live, have such an opportunity again. But perhaps Lady Grace did not approve of it?”

“She was not displeased at it.”

“Well, well, child, I hope you will never have cause to repent your decision.” And Mr. Eyre, with a sigh, turned the conversation, and they soon were chatting again amicably over their early tea.

“And how is dear old madame, papa?”

“I went to see her yesterday, to tell her you were coming back; and the old lady brightened up at once, and seemed so glad. She has missed you sadly.”

“I will go over to the cottage as soon as we have finished tea, but I’ll be home by eight again. Susan can fetch me.”

“I’ll come myself; there’s nothing much for me to do this evening.”

So Winifred put on her hat, and went off to pay her visit.

Mme. de Montolieu was at the window, evidently expecting her, and in a minute the two were in each other’s arms.

“Ah! my child, I have wearied so to see you,” and tears filled the kind old eyes.

“And I am so glad to see you again, dear madame, you can not think.”

“And now, my child, tell me everything that has happened to you since you have been away.”

So Winifred took a low stool, and sat at her old friend’s

feet, and poured forth her story to the attentive ears of madame.

Lady Grace's goodness, Sir Clayton's literary talent, Miss Alton's sweetness, Colonel d'Aguiar's disappointment, her dislike to Francis Clayton, Lord Harold's kindness, and her cousin's insolence—all took their part in her recital. The old French lady was genuinely pleased at the success of her favorite, and all the more because she seemed unspoiled by it. And she loved Winifred so dearly, even as old, way-worn, dying-out lives cling to bright, fresh young girlhood as the only link to the past. There are some few people in the world whose minds retain the youth that their bodies can not preserve.

Young people, beyond a doubt, are egotistical. It is a great pleasure to them to talk of their own doings and everything that concerns them. And my Winifred, whom I have no desire to present to my readers as perfect, was not devoid of this little weakness, and, in consequence, spent a very pleasant evening in giving a full and particular account to her old friend of her visit. As we grow older we become more reticent; our desire is to hear the most and to impart the least.

The day following her return, Winifred experienced a slight reaction. Coming home is always very delightful just at first, but when the novelty has worn off, and one has visited every part of the house, and had a chat with all the members of the family, one is apt (until one is settled to accustomed occupations) to feel, just the least bit in the world, mopish and discontented. And as the days wore on, the girl began to ponder in her own mind whether she had not been a little hasty in refusing Lord Harold so decidedly. Her life might go on now just in the quiet, prosaic way it had always done, and she might never have the opportunity again of marrying a man beyond her father's rank in life. If she must marry some one she was indifferent to (and young girls never dream of going through life old maids), surely the companionship of a refined, well-bred lord would be less intolerable than that of a cloddish farmer. And as, where the heart is not really concerned, absence is sure to make it grow fonder, Winifred called to mind that there was certainly nothing in Lord Harold Erskine to inspire repulsion; but that on the contrary, she had always found him a delightful companion.

She had been at home three days, and was proceeding on her usual afternoon visit to the cottage, when she met old Mrs. Fenner. Winifred had an extreme repugnance to the old woman at all times, and was now more than ever averse to the idea of meeting her; but she had passed the path across the common where she might have avoided her, and had no choice but to meet her on the straight road. And feeling a little guilty in having treated the son of this doting mother with harshness and contempt, she felt constrained to make some poor amends to the old mother.

She stopped and put out her hand, but the old woman did not take it.

"My hands are full," she said bitterly; "and besides, rough hands like mine, as are not used to gloves, aren't fit for such delicate ladies' fingers as yours are, Miss Eyre."

Winifred colored.

"I have always been very glad to shake hands with you, Mrs. Fenner."

"Oh, yes, I'm sure you've always been most kind and condescending, Miss Eyre," the old woman retorted with an angry sneer; "of course it's quite natural you should think yourself somebody, now that you've been took up by grand folks, though it might do ye good to think o' the times when you didn't think yourself no better than my Tom, when your grand relations gave ye the go-by in the street, and wouldn't so much as notice ye."

"I do not know why you should want to insult me, Mrs. Fenner," began Winifred, haughtily.

"Insult you?" echoed Mrs. Fenner, with an offensive snort. "Oh, you're mighty grand, I dare say, and nobody must speak their mind to you; but I'll just tell you mine, for all that. You're a bad, false girl, with your fine, plausible ways. And mark my word, you'll be a bad woman, and no good'll come of ye. You've got the curse of a mother whose heart you've broken, and whose only prop and stay you've taken away. I dare say you're happy now you've drove my son away from his farm, where he was making an honest livin', and sent him away to Australy, to be eat up by savages."

"Do you mean to say your son is going to Australia?" exclaimed Winifred, feeling a sudden pang of remorse.

"Yes, I do; and I mean to say it's you as have drove him to it, and broke my heart, and my curse is on you,

and it'll come true to ye, as it does to every one as injures the widow and the fatherless."

And the old woman broke into fierce sobs; and Winifred, too frightened to stir, stood trembling and ghastly pale. In the excitement of the moment they had neither of them heard the approach of a horse, and it was not until her own name was uttered close to her, that Winifred was aware of the presence of a third person. She started and looked up, half in terror, half relieved, and met the gaze of Lord Harold Erskine who had dismounted, and was standing by her.

"Miss Eyre, what is it? You are in distress. Can I help you?" he exclaimed, in a tone of anxious solicitude, at which old Mrs. Fenner looked up sharply.

She saw at a glance the new-comer was a gentleman, something different from her own class; there was an air of refinement about his look and dress that she was not accustomed to; and then she noticed the sleek, well-groomed coat of the magnificent animal he held by the bridle.

"So, then," she thought, "this is one of her grand new friends."

And a spiteful gleam came into her old eyes.

"Come with me, Miss Eyre—come with me," Lord Harold urged, seeing the girl he loved so tenderly was agitated and frightened.

"Oh, yes, take her away!" exclaimed Mrs. Fenner, in a shrill, excited voice. "She's too dainty now to hear the truth from an honest woman. But *I* warn you, my fine sir, *I* warn you against her. She's bad and false, and she'll make up to you, and pretend to be fond of you, like she did my poor boy, as she's drove away from his home with her ways, and then she'll get quite grand, and turn ye over—except she wants your money."

Poor Winifred was trembling in every limb with fright and indignation.

"Oh! Lord Harold," she exclaimed, "do take me away!"

"Oh! a lord, is it?" shrieked the old woman, half beside herself. "P'rhaps she won't behave so bad to you, my lord, as she did to my poor farmer boy!"

Lord Harold took Winifred by the hand and led her away, keeping his horse on the other side; while the incensed old woman remained standing in the middle of the road, screaming shrill, angry words after them.

Neither spoke for some time. Winifred was greatly agitated, and Lord Harold was very considerate to her. At last she turned to him, with a face and voice full of distress:

“Lord Harold, you do not believe what she said?”

“I would not believe any one who spoke ill of you, Miss Eyre—certainly not a vindictive old shrew.”

“It is quite true her son asked me to marry him, but I could not endure him. I never gave him any encouragement; indeed I did not, and he was very coarse and insolent to me.”

Lord Harold anathematized Mr. Fenner under his breath.

“I have not seen his mother since,” Winifred continued, “and I stopped to speak to her just now, and she insulted me, and frightened me by her violence.”

“Do not think any more about her, Winifred; I want you to think of something else. I am not going to vex you, or press a suit that is distasteful to you, but I should like you to listen to a few words I have to say, and then I will take your answer and go. I had resolved to accept your determination, and to keep away from you, but I fancied that when you were back in your quiet home you might think more of me, and your thoughts might change. This is a very quiet, dull life for you, dearest; it is not fit that you should be exposed to the coarse admiration, or the coarser anger, of these country clods. I want to place you in the rank and station that you would adorn, and I feel that all I have to offer you is but too little in exchange for your love. Nay, don't look distressed, I only desire to put it before you once more, simply and straightforwardly. I think I could make you happy; at all events, I would leave no stone unturned. Will you give me hope?—will you try and learn to love me?”

Winifred was sorely tempted to yield—at any rate so far as to reconsider the matter. She had begun to feel in the last two days that her life might be dull and irksome in that quiet country place, after she had once tasted the pleasures of society and excitement; and the meeting with Mrs. Fenner had made her soul revolt against the people she was living and likely to live among. What a different existence hers might be as Lady Harold Erskine? And then the quick thought rushed into her mind that if she took the man pleading at her side she must resolve to give up

all remembrance, all hope, of Mr. Hastings. Her eyes were open at last to the fact; in spite of her passionate anger against him, her thoughts of him did not lie altogether in the past. If she had never known Errol Hastings, she might come to love Harold Erskine. As it was, the world might justly have quoted of her the fable of the dog and the shadow. She was relinquishing a substantial good for the luxury of a memory. She was only a child still, a foolish, romantic child; later, perhaps, she might have been more worldly wise. I can not say she never regretted her rejection of the grandeur she had longed for. I am tempted to think that, in the loneliness of the days and weeks that followed, she accused herself of having acted foolishly.

"Winifred!" exclaimed Lord Harold, as she paused, "I don't want to pain you; give me a fair, honest answer, tell me to go or stay; but, if you can, let me hope."

"I can not give you hope. I can not tell you to stay!" she said in a faltering voice, with large tears quivering in her eyes.

He stood for a moment very pale and quiet, then he raised her hand very reverently to his lips. Not a word did he utter; but Winifred heard the quick, choking sob in his throat as he turned away and mounted his horse. She stood looking wistfully after him, and then she went slowly home. Her visit to Mme. de Montolieu was deferred until the afternoon.

"Papa," she said, when Mr. Eyre came in to dinner, "is it true that Mr. Fenner is going to Australia?"

"Yes; who told you?"

"I met Mrs. Fenner this morning, and, oh, papa, she cursed me and said such wicked things!"

"I am sorry you chanced to meet her. I knew she is very bitter against you. She says he has been an altered man since you refused him; he has taken to drinking, and neglects his farm, and now nothing will do but he must sell up everything and go off to Australia. Poor old soul! she seems heart-broken about it."

"I am very grieved, papa; but what could I do? I detest him!"

"I don't know that you could do anything, my dear; but it is a bad job for the lad's mother. She would go with

him, I believe, but he won't take her now, and she says he always was such a good son before."

"Oh!" thought Winifred, in a petulant mood, "why did I ever long for lovers? I am sure mine have been nothing but grief and heart-breaking to me. I hope I shall never have any more; and there doesn't seem much chance of it now."

* * * * *

My story, so far as I have told it hitherto, has been of a fair young girl, whom I loved to write of. But I am going to leave her now for awhile, as the way of the world is to desert those whom troubles overshadow. There is no amusement to be gained from our friends when they are in bitterness and grief; therefore, why should I trouble you, my whilom acquaintances, with the sorrows of one who is a stranger to you?

Ah! poor child, I have sorrowed for you keenly; but the young must have their heart-breakings, and there is no consoler like Time.

And we, the privileged tellers of our own and our friends' stories, may, if we list, pass over the sad passages, may suffer, may lament, may forget, all in that tiny blank space that divides one chapter from another.

CHAPTER XII.

UN MARIAGE DE CONVENANCE.

It was nearly seventeen months since Errol Hastings had stood on the deck of the "Ænone," looking down into the Mediterranean, and thinking of the woman he loved so deeply. She was not a woman, though, then—she was only a fresh young girl; and in her sweet, simple purity lay the charm she had for the man of the world.

This is intended for a veracious story, and therefore I am not going to pretend that at the end of seventeen months his passionate love and longing for her were still unchanged or unlessened by time. It was not so; he had still a very sweet recollection of her, but he did not feel, as when he parted from her, that there was no pleasure in life so long as he was absent from her. I think if we might, without detriment to him in the gentle reader's opinion, confess the

real truth, he was a little disposed to be angry with himself for allowing an "infatuation" to drive him from his country and the home he had purposed remaining in. He had traveled far during this term of voluntary exile, and he was wearied and longing to be home again. "I have bought my experience of women dearly," he thought, a bitter smile curling his lip; "it will take something more than a woman's smiles or a woman's scorn to drive me from England and Hazell Court again." He was staying for a month in Paris on the way home, and the brilliant society he mixed with was very pleasant after his long isolation.

To-night, he was to meet an old friend at the opera—a woman whom he had always liked, but who had never seemed so charming to him as she did now, with her pretty assumption of matronhood. Her husband was detestable, certainly, and she knew it. Surely the continuance of an old friendship must be grateful to one who could not be very happy. And with a strong interest, very keenly awakened, Mr. Hastings walked that evening into Mrs. Clayton's opera-box.

The husband and wife were together alone. The former was gazing intently through his glass at a very showy-looking supernumerary, and the latter leaned back indifferently, with a strong expression of discontent and weariness on her pretty face. She was prettier, perhaps, than when we last saw her as Fee Alton; but sadder, more pensive, and her beauty was enhanced by the magnificence of her jewelry. A costly fan and jeweled lorgnette lay in her lap; but her eyes brightened and sparkled as the door opened and Mr. Hastings entered. Mr. Clayton affected not to be aware of the presence of the new-comer, and redoubled his attention to the stage.

"I am so glad you have come!" Mrs. Clayton said, smiling up in Errol's face, and yielding her hand to his gentle pressure—"I was so dull. None of my friends have been up to see me, and Mr. Clayton is so fascinated by some lovely creature on the stage, that he has no eyes for any one else. Francis," she continued, touching her husband—"Francis, Mr. Hastings is here."

Still Mr. Clayton appeared absorbed.

"He hears me quite well, you know," Mrs. Clayton whispered, in an audible aside, "but he won't take any notice, because he is in a temper with me,"

Either Mr. Clayton heard the remark, or something must at the moment have occurred on the stage to annoy him, for he ground his heel on the floor, and cursed something or somebody between his teeth.

Mrs. Clayton was a spoiled little creature, and she rather enjoyed aggravating her lord when the presence of a third person prevented any outbreak on his part.

"Francis!" she said again, pushing his arm with her fan—"Francis, do you hear?"

This time he was forced to look round, and he moved his arm so sharply that it snapped the delicate-wrought toy.

"There, now!" exclaimed his wife, "you have broken my lovely fan that Count d'Arcy sent me, you odious man! I believe you did it intentionally."

Mr. Clayton looked savagely at her, and then he gave a surly recognition to Mr. Hastings.

"I hardly expected to see you here this evening," he said.

"You know, Francis, I told you I asked Mr. Hastings to come," said Fee, maliciously. "Your memory is not usually so defective."

Madame was not in the best of tempers—constant contact with a man like her husband had not tended to increase the amiability of her disposition.

Mr. Clayton turned away to the stage, and left his wife to an uninterrupted conversation with her friend. But all the same he was trying to hear every word that passed between them; he was far too small-minded to be free from jealousy and suspicion. Fee was perfectly aware that he was listening, so she dropped her voice to a whisper, and flirted away in a very animated manner with Mr. Hastings, who, truth to tell, was by no means averse. Francis Clayton was gradually becoming furious. At the end of the third act he arose.

"It is time to put on your cloak," he said, in a harsh, unpleasant voice.

"Why, dear?" asked Fee, looking up with languid innocence, "are you afraid I shall take cold? You are not usually so solicitous about me."

"I ordered the carriage early, and I do not choose my horses to be kept waiting," he replied, scarcely deigning to look at her.

"Ah! poor things," remarked Fee, provokingly; "I hope they won't take cold."

Mr. Clayton moved toward the door, and his wife resumed her conversation with more animation than ever.

"Are you coming?" he exclaimed, turning impatiently.

"Me—coming?" returned Fee, nonchalantly, raising her eyebrows. "My dear Francis, what could put such an absurd idea into your head?"

To be treated with indifference, and, worse, ridicule, is naturally disagreeable to any man; but it made Mr. Clayton, sulky and ill-tempered as he already was, perfectly aflame with rage.

"Mrs. Clayton, do you hear me?" His voice was almost inarticulate with anger.

"No, dear; what were you saying?"

"I say I do not choose the horses to be kept waiting, and you are to come."

"I never knew you so particular before; and, do you know, dear, I heard you actually kept them an hour at Samper's the day before yesterday."

Mr. Clayton literally ground his teeth; and Mr. Hastings felt decidedly uncomfortable at being a third party in so unconjugal a scene.

"For the last time, Marion, are you coming?"

"Certainly not."

"Then I shall go alone. Henry can get you a *fiacre* when you feel disposed to follow me." And the amiable husband left the box.

Mrs. Clayton was as bitter and angry as a high-spirited woman would naturally be, under the circumstances; but she went on talking to her companion very fast, to conceal her annoyance. She was too proud to make any allusion to her husband's treatment of her, and Mr. Hastings appeared not to have noticed it. But he felt for her keenly. He did not quite justify her, or think she had behaved wisely, but he saw what the man was, and felt there must have been some strong under-current of bitterness to change the bright, good-tempered, sunny little fairy he had known formerly to the indifferent, provoking woman of to-night. "Poor little girl!" he thought to himself, "I dare say she has found out by this time that money doesn't bring happiness."

Mrs. Clayton remained until the fifth act was half over;

then she asked Errol to see if her servant was in the hall. He left the box, and returned almost immediately.

"My brougham is at your disposal, Mrs. Clayton, and your servant is just calling it up."

She thanked him, and he put her cloak carefully round her, and gave her his arm.

"Good-night!" she said, when she was seated in the carriage. "Many thanks for your timely aid. Will you come and see us to-morrow at our hotel?"

He promised; and at parting he held her hand longer than is strictly necessary in wishing good-bye. She did not take it away, but the moment afterward she was angry with him and with herself. "Will he think less of me," she thought, "because my husband slighted me, and I stayed with him and took his brougham?"

As she entered the court-yard of the hotel, her own carriage passed out. She felt almost too bitter to speak. With a chafing heart, she went to her own sitting-room, but her husband was there, and she turned away. He called to her imperiously, but she went upstairs to her dressing-room. She heard his rapid footsteps behind her, and would have shut the door on him, but he held it open with his hand.

"Leave the room, Harris!" he said to the maid, who began to unfasten her mistress's cloak.

"Excuse me," said Fee, "I am tired, and have no inclination to talk."

"Go!" said Mr. Clayton to the maid, "and wait until I call you."

Fee remained standing by the fire-place, playing with her broken fan—she could not trust herself to speak.

"How did you come home, Marion?"

Mrs. Clayton was silent. Her husband repeated the question.

"I decline to answer," she replied, quivering with anger.

"But I insist on knowing."

"Then go and ask the servant you were good enough to leave behind to take care of me."

"I choose to hear it from yourself."

"I shall not tell you."

"You shall!" and he grasped her hand hard.

"Let me go?—how dare you touch me?" she cried, passionately. "Do you think I am frightened of you, be-

cause you are a bully and a coward? I despise you even more than I hate you! Perhaps you think it fine to insult me before Mr. Hastings. I suppose you hardly know what a brave man and a gentleman like him would think of such despicable meanness."

"He has been sympathizing with you, perhaps?" sneered Francis, furiously.

"He could scarcely do otherwise," Fee retored.

"By Heaven! then, I won't have men sympathizing with my wife, and blackguarding me behind my back for their own purposes!"

There was a large amount of latent fire in Mrs. Clayton's nature, and it all flashed up at her husband's words.

"Leave my room this instant!" and she moved a step toward him with a gesture of such passionate anger that he literally quailed before her. But he went.

"*Au revoir, mon ange*," he sneered in the door way.

Sobs almost choked the miserable wife as she turned to the fire; but she forced them back and rang the bell—she was too proud to bear the pity or sympathy of her waiting-maid. If ever a woman regretted, or had cause to regret, a mercenary marriage, it was Mrs. Clayton. If she could have but foreseen! Ah! if all of us could foresee the ruin our best plans for happiness may bring upon us. We already know Francis Clayton's character—his detestable meanness, his selfishness and cynicism; but we might still have hoped that the influence of a happy, sunny nature like Fee's might have humanized and improved him. It was far otherwise. She had done him no good, and he had almost spoiled her. However amiable she might be, she certainly was not judicious. He was jealous, exacting and suspicious; and she thwarted and tormented him, first in fun, then in earnest.

They had been married fourteen months now. At first, and during the season, Mrs. Clayton had managed to drown her regrets by constant gayety and dissipation. She had a magnificent establishment. She drove the finest horses in the Park, and she was the rage. Then her husband became jealous—she laughed at him. He wanted to take her away to a dull county house in the height of the season—she positively refused to go. Lady Marion remonstrated with him, and he forbade her the house. Fee threatened to leave his roof unless he retracted his words and apologized. When

the season was over he took her to Scotland, and she became exceedingly ill. Her aunt was sent for in haste, and she gave birth prematurely to a son. Francis Clayton was furious, and reproached her violently because the child died. There were constant scenes between them, and the bright, light-hearted little fairy was almost always in tears.

Once in London she had met Colonel d'Aguilar. He bowed gravely to her, but did not come up to speak. She sent for him.

"Won't you ask me to dance?" she said, when he came. He bowed.

"The first dance after supper," she said, and he assented and walked away. Her husband came up immediately.

"Are you going to dance with that fellow?"

"Who? Lord Poinsfort?"

"You know whom I mean! That ass, D'Aguilar."

"I am going to dance with Colonel d'Aguilar."

"When?"

"After supper."

Mr. Clayton went down-stairs and sent off a messenger to order his carriage immediately. The musicians had commenced a set of waltzes, and Colonel d'Aguilar went to claim Mrs. Clayton as his partner. At that moment her husband came up, and drew her hand under his arm.

"Come, Marion—the carriage is waiting."

"I am going to dance with Colonel d'Aguilar."

"You are coming with me!" he said, in a low, fierce voice; and there was a gleam of such anger and hatred in his eyes that she did not dare refuse. But she never spoke a word to him for two days afterward.

They had been in Paris for two months, and Mrs. Clayton was restless and miserable, and longing to be at home. They went a good deal into society, and Fee made a great point of not quarreling with her husband in public. It was only before an old friend like Mr. Hastings she was tempted to break out.

The day after their meeting at the opera, Mr. Hastings called on Mrs. Clayton; and Mr. Clayton, suspecting the visit, was purposely at home. Fee brightened up when Mr. Hastings was announced. She had always liked him; now in her loneliness and misery she ranked him as a dear old friend. Her manner was all the more *empressee* because she wanted to annoy her husband.

"Mr. Hastings, I am delighted to see you; I was just feeling so frightfully bored and dull. I hope you bring a whole budget of news and scandal."

"I must ask first after my old friend, Lady Marion," he answered. "I can not forgive myself for my remissness in not doing so last night."

"Aunt is very well, thank you. I heard from her this morning. She says she is dreadfully dull without me, and is longing to see us back again."

"I often think how she must miss you. I almost wonder she does not remain with you."

"So she would, gladly, but Mr. Clayton won't let her. Of course, if we have a difference of opinion, she takes my part, and he says something rude to her, and she is offended. Is it not so, Francis?"

Mr. Clayton muttered something about a mother-in-law being bad enough, but an aunt-in-law was more than anybody bargained for.

"And as matrimony is altogether a commercial speculation," rejoined Fee, with a delightful smile, "you can't, of course, take more than you bargain for—can you, Mr. Hastings?"

Errol was by no means pleased at being made a third party to matrimonial differences, and made an effort to change the conversation.

"Have you seen anything of Lady Grace Farquhar, lately, Mrs. Clayton?" he asked.

"She was here not a moment ago, and she has adopted such a sweet, charming girl. They are like mother and daughter; and even that selfish old book-worm, Sir Clayton, seems quite taken with her. I wish you had been here sooner, I know you would have been in love with her."

"I thought Mr. Hastings knew Miss Eyre," interposed Francis Clayton. "At all events, I recollect hearing their names connected in some story about meeting in a wood."

Errol started slightly, and it might have been fancy, but Fee certainly thought a deeper color came into his bronzed face. Mr. Clayton seemed to think the same, for he proceeded in his usual amiable manner.

"She and Erskine were awfully sweet on each other when we were staying at the Vale. I dare say that will be a match. Lady Grace seems quite agreeable to it; but of course it's a shocking bad one for him."

"Francis," exclaimed his wife, "how you exaggerate! You know Winifred never cared for Lord Harold. She won't confess it, but I am quite sure he made her an offer, and that she refused him. He never will meet her if he can help it."

"Did you say that Lady Grace had adopted her, Mrs. Clayton?"

"Yes, more than a year ago; indeed, before I was married. She was in such sad trouble, poor girl. She was very fond of her father, and he was killed suddenly in a very shocking way. His horse ran away with him, and he was thrown out of the dog-cart and killed on the spot. They thought she never would get over it, and Lady Grace took her home and nursed her as if she had been her own child. Old Sir Howard Champion would have taken her, but she refused to go near them, because they would not acknowledge her father. She has promised to come and stay with me when we get back to town. You must come and meet her."

"I shall be—very—happy," stammered Errol.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO PROTECTORS.

ERROL HASTINGS, riding toward the Bois de Boulogne, pondered much on what he had heard. He was surprised—he tried to believe he was pleased; but somehow or other his satisfaction was not very genuine. Miss Eyre had certainly made a fortunate step in life; true, she had lost a father whom she loved, but then she had gained a friend, a firm friend, in Lady Grace Farquhar. She would get introduced into good society, and perhaps—but, bah! that was not a train of thought he cared to follow. Had not Erskine already been at her feet? What the deuce had that fellow Clayton meant by insinuating she had cared for him? Erskine was a good fellow, no doubt, but there was nothing in him to win the heart of such a creature as Winifred Eyre. And she was not the girl to take a man for what he had, as poor Fee Alton had done. Ah! what a lamentable marriage that was! How on earth had it been possible for such a bright young beauty to sell herself to a

brute like Clayton? If *he* had been her brother, he would have horsewhipped him for his treatment of her the previous night. The man must be a fool, too, thought Mr. Hasting, or he must want to get rid of her. To leave her in public at the opera, alone with another man, seemed to him the excess of folly and indecorum. "I was an old friend," he reflected, "but had it been any one else—well, he might have been less careful of her reputation. Who was it told me she had been fond of that nice fellow, D'Aguilar, I met at Vienna? He was a gentleman. What on earth are women's hearts made of, I wonder? Why, it seems to me, if I were a girl, I would rather take a man like D'Aguilar without a penny, than a miserable egotist such as Clayton, if he were a prince of the blood! No doubt poor Fee thinks so now. If her husband doesn't take care she will fall to thinking of her old lover, and drawing contrast; and then if they meet—"

Mr. Hastings' soliloquy was cut short by seeing the very man he was thinking of walking leisurely along the Champs Elysées. He drew rein instantly.

"D'Aguilar!" he cried.

"Hastings!" exclaimed the other, as they shook hands warmly.

"I thought you were back with your regiment," said Errol.

"I have a month more leave, and my brother asked me to join him here, and so I came."

"How long have you been here?"

"Three days. I saw you last night at the opera."

"Did you? Where were you?"

"Just opposite to you, in the Countess de Bienvenu's box. You were with Mrs. Clayton."

"Yes, and her husband."

"I came in late. I did not see Mr. Clayton."

"He went out rather early. Mrs. Clayton and I are old friends."

"Ah! yes; I heard them mention you once at Endon Vale."

"Endon Vale?" cried Errol. "Do you know the Farquhars?"

"Yes, very well. But when I knew Mrs. Clayton I was on my first visit there."

A great many questions came into Errol's head that he

would have liked to ask Colonel d'Aguilar at once; but conversation is neither easy or agreeable when carried on with a pedestrian from the altitude of a horse's back, particularly when your steed is restive and impatient.

"Come up to my hotel to-night, D'Aguilar, will you?" Mr. Hastings said.

"Very well; I suppose you are going to the ball at the Embassy?"

"Yes; but not before twelve."

"Then I'll look in about ten."

"Will you not come and dine? I expect Hilton and D'Eyncourt. You know them both."

"Not to-night, thanks; I am engaged to dine at the Maison Dorée."

"To-morrow, then."

"To-morrow my brother gives a dinner-party. And the next two days I am engaged myself."

"Tuesday, then."

"Tuesday be it. At all events I'll look in to-night."

And the two men parted just as Mrs. Clayton rolled past in her handsome carriage, drawn by high-stepping horses. She looked like a lovely little Esquimaux, enveloped in her soft white furs, and she gave Mr. Hastings a bright smile, and the wave of a delicately gloved little hand. She had not observed Colonel d'Aguilar.

Sixteen months had passed since the day when they had ridden together down the avenue of broad-leaved chestnuts at Endon Vale, laughing at Francis Clayton's discomfiture. It was his turn to laugh now. She was not altered—at all events, it did not seem so in the momentary glance he had caught of her smiling face. Was she then utterly heartless? Could she have lived all these months with such a hateful, contemptible wretch as Clayton, and still go on smiling and flirting, and give no sign? Colonel d'Aguilar knew none of the particulars of the marriage; he had not even heard that she was unhappy; he had but met her once, and then she had left him at her husband's command, with a smile on her lips.

He turned and walked back unhappy and resentful. I think he hardly knew why he was so; but we who are privileged, and know more of the hearts that we so unceremoniously lay bare for the entertainment of the gentle reader than the owners thereof themselves, may confident-

ly assert that the beaming smile which Mrs. Clayton bestowed on his friend gave Ivors d'Aguilar considerably more pain and annoyance than he would have cared to confess.

Mr. Clayton, as well as his wife, was profoundly ignorant of Colonel d'Aguilar's arrival in Paris, or he would as soon have trusted his wife alone in that fine city, as he would have walked willingly himself into the cage of the lion in the Jardin des Plantes.

The morning after Mr. Hastings' visit, a letter came to Mr. Clayton, announcing that one of his bailiffs was supposed to have robbed him to a considerable extent. The man himself had no idea that he was suspected. Francis Clayton was beside himself; he vowed vengeance against the delinquent—he would convict him—he would get him transported—his wife and children should be reduced to shame and beggary! He ordered his wife to have her things packed at once, and to be ready to start that afternoon for England. Mrs. Clayton, as it happened, was rather anxious to stay, and, on this occasion, had tact enough to dissemble her real feelings.

"How delightful!" she exclaimed. "I am longing to get back to England to see aunt. I will give Haynes orders to begin packing at once."

Francis Clayton, with his characteristic amiability, was quite disappointed to find his wife made no objection to going. But he could not very well say, "You shall not go, because you would like to."

He waited half an hour, and went out of the room. Presently he returned.

"I find I shall have to go by an earlier train, Marion, so I shall leave you here, and return for you in a week or ten days."

"Oh! do take me with you, Francis," said the little hypocrite, pretending to look disappointed.

"Pshaw! I tell you it is not convenient."

"But what am I to do if you go? I can not go to all these balls and dinners we are engaged to, alone."

"Nonsense. Madame de Saint Geran will chaperon you if you still want a chaperon," added the agreeable husband, with a sneer. "She knows every friend and acquaintance we have in Paris. And mind, I won't have that fellow Hastings coming calling here in my absence."

"Now, Francis, is it likely?" said his wife, innocently.

"Yes, d——d likely," was the amiable rejoinder.

"I do not like that Madame de Saint Geran," Fee remarked, presently.

"And why, pray?"

"She is so insincere—she pays one such impossible compliments."

"You mean she has plenty of tact. It would be a good thing for you and the rest of your countrywomen if you had a little more. I shall call on her before I go, and ask her to look after you while I am away."

Mme. de Saint Geran was an old friend and flame of Francis Clayton's, and she had for some reason (or rather from some caprice) tolerated what she called "her English bear." "I like consistency," she said on being rallied for her seeming partiality for him, and he is consistent, *en quoi?* in being disagreeable and a cynic," and she laughed one of her sprightly, affected laughs. Francis Clayton, assuming the privileges of an old friend, paid her a most unfashionably early visit, and she received him in a demi-toilet of elegant simplicity in her own boudoir, and was most graciously pleased to accede to his request. She would be charmed to have the constant companionship of one "*aussi belle et charmante que Madame Clayton*." That very evening, if she were not too *triste* at the departure of her husband, Mme. de Saint Geran would take her to see this marvelous new opera that all Paris raved about, and afterward to the ball given by the Duchess de Beaucour.

"Tell madame, your wife," she said, in parting, "that at nine o'clock this evening I shall have the honor to call for her."

And Francis Clayton bent over her hand, and kissed it in a manner that might both have edified and astonished madame his wife. Then he returned to the hotel, delivered the message to Fee, bade her good-bye, and kissing her coldly, jumped into his brougham, which was in attendance to convey him to the station.

Mrs. Clayton drew her chair nearer the fire, put her dainty feet on the bright fender, and looked into the fire with as happy and pleasant a smile as though the British Channel was not about to divide her from her lord, and to make him miserably sick into the bargain.

Mme. de Saint Geran called for her at the appointed

time, and they spent two hours very pleasantly at the opera, during which several gentlemen of their acquaintance dropped in to see them, and paid their court to either lady, as taste or diplomacy suggested. Once or twice the Frenchwoman looked curiously at her lovely companion, who for once was as bright and sparkling as in the olden days.

"How is it possible," she thought, "for a man to be indifferent to a creature so divine?"

They had seen enough of the opera, and their carriage being called, they drove off to the ball. In the first room Mrs. Clayton met with Mr. Hastings. She took his arm, and they joined the dancers.

"My husband is away," she whispered, "and I shall dance to-night to my heart's content. - If he were here, he would not let me."

The dance was over, and they were wandering together through the magnificent conservatories that led from the ball-room. Suddenly Mr. Hastings felt his companion's hand tremble violently on his arm, and he looked down quickly into her face. It was crimson with blushes. The words "Are you ill?" were on his lips, but at that moment he caught sight of Colonel d'Aguilar advancing, and was discreetly silent. A quick glance, an undecided bow, passed between them, and they both moved on. When Mrs. Clayton returned to find Mme. de Saint Geran, Colonel d'Aguilar formed one of the knot of men who stood talking with her. They were obliged to speak then; and against his better judgment, against her own resolve, she went back to the ball-room on his arm. They were perfectly discreet, their conversation was simply such as the merest acquaintances might have held; the danger was in the fascination the presence of each had for the other. She did not dance with him any more than she did with Mr. Hastings; but when she went home she reproached herself bitterly for the time she had spent in his society, while she never gave a single thought to Errol Hastings.

It was three weeks before Mr. Clayton returned to Paris for his wife, and during that time she met Colonel d'Aguilar almost every day. Mme. de Saint Geran was not aware of their previous relations to each other; and even had she been, her French ideas of the proprieties would not have suffered in the least. Besides, if she had any inclination to shrug her beautifully enameled shoulders at her companion's

freedom of manner with one of the opposite sex, Mr. Hastings would most certainly have been that one to whom her suspicions might have inclined. Fee took very great and undisguised pleasure in the companionship of her old friend. She regarded him as a brother. I dare assert very few things, so I will not pledge my word on this occasion that his thoughts of her were as strictly fraternal. Pity, we are told, is akin to love, and I may only vouch that his pity for her was sincere and heart-felt. There is only one thing that I presume to assert positively, and that is that during those three weeks in which Colonel d'Aguilar and Mrs. Clayton were constantly in each other's society, there was not a word or an allusion that could have caused jealousy on the part of the most suspicious man on earth. It was only now and then a look or a hand pressure, and then it was invariably followed by remorse on her part, and self-reproach and accusation on his. It would have been far better if he had had the courage to go away at once—it would be far better, ah! my friends, if we all took the first counsel our conscience gives us, instead of prevaricating with it, and drowning its still small voice, until it is silent altogether! Who shall teach us wisdom? Not Solomon, though the time will come when we must all admire and acknowledge the depth of his insight and understanding, but that will only be when we have bought his experience for ourselves.

Colonel d'Aguilar and Mr. Hastings had grown very intimate; they saw, and understood, and appreciated each other's good qualities, and yet somehow, there was a constraint, a half mistrust, between them. Errol Hastings had placed himself in the position of an old friend to Mrs. Clayton; he watched over her (nominally) like a brother, but with a great deal more than fraternal solicitude or interest; at all events, as it is understood in the common acceptance of the term. Colonel d'Aguilar almost unconsciously resented this; he did not put any faith in what is called platonic friendship; he believed Mr. Hastings to have a much deeper interest in Mrs. Clayton, and he would have liked, had he known how, to prevent their meeting constantly. He knew, too, that Mr. Hastings occasionally visited her at her hotel, while he never so much as set foot in it. And Errol, seeing no impropriety and no danger in his own constant companionship with the neg-

lected wife, saw the greatest harm, and pictured to himself the worst results from her intimacy with her old lover.

"So, between these men, who liked and respected each other in their hearts, there was a strange kind of antagonism. At the opera, at balls, both hovered near the woman whom one loved, and the other liked sincerely, to ward off the harm each other's presence might create. If one whispered to her, the other would break in abruptly upon the conversation; and curiously enough, each longed to remonstrate with the other, but a manly reticence and dislike of interfering held them back. A time came when silence seemed no longer possible to the man whose heart was really interested. He was at a ball, and from behind one of the porphyry columns that supported the magnificent saloon, he watched the dancers, and among them Mrs. Clayton and Mr. Hastings. Presently the music ceased, and the brilliant throng passed before him in pairs to the suite of rooms and conservatories beyond. A knot of young men stood just in front of Colonel d'Aguilar, and as the pair whom he was watching passed before them, talking intently, one pert young dandy made a remark, which it behooves us not to repeat here, but which made the ears of the solitary listener to tingle. The other men only laughed.

Mr. Hastings had just put his fair partner into her carriage, when he felt a touch on his arm. He looked round, and saw Colonel d'Aguilar.

"Are you going back to the ball-room?"

"I did intend to. Why?"

"I wanted to speak to you; but another time will do as well."

"No time like the present. Will you come home with me in the brougham?"

"I had rather walk, if you do not object."

"Not the least. Wait till I get my great-coat, and send my fellow home. I will be with you in a moment."

Five minutes afterward they were walking homeward together.

"Hastings, I have something very unpleasant on my mind; I want to get rid of it."

"Are you going to make me your confidant?"

"Yes; but I must say a few words first to explain myself. I know you are a good fellow and a gentleman, and I don't think you'll take offense at my words. You are

too honorable yourself to suspect treachery in others; I am not afraid you will doubt my motives. I have wanted to speak to you every day for the last week, but I had not the courage. I should not say it now, but for something I heard to-night."

"Speak out, D'Aguilar," Mr. Hastings said, a little impatiently; "what did your hear?"

Colonel d'Aguilar spoke out word for word the speech he had heard in the ball-room. Errol uttered a sharp, angry oath.

"Who said it?"

"No one whom I know either by sight or name."

"But you can point him out to me," and Hastings turned to go back.

"I should not tell you even if I knew," Colonel d'Aguilar answered, quietly. "You surely do not want to destroy Mrs. Clayton's reputation by quarreling about her."

"May I ask what more you have got to say to me?"

"I want to beg you not to compromise her by your attentions."

Errol looked, as he felt, puzzled.

"That is a curious thing for you to ask of me, D'Aguilar."

"It may seem so on the surface. If I proceed further and tell you something I feel bound to explain, you may think differently. Perhaps I hardly need say that nothing less urgent than I deem the present circumstances would induce me to lay bare the one secret of my heart to a scrutiny that, be it sympathetic, or the reverse, is very painful to me. When Mrs. Clayton was Miss Alton, before she was engaged to her husband—we were all staying together at Endon Vale—I loved her—very dearly; and I thought she cared for me, although I knew my own circumstances precluded the idea of her accepting me. I swear to you, Hastings, I could have borne to see her marry some good-hearted, honest man, who could have given her the wealth and rank she needed, almost without a pang; but to think of that delicate, bright little creature as the wife of a base-minded churl like Clayton, almost drove me mad. Of course one can put up with a good deal, and one is used to hear men speak not too respectfully of the fair sex, but I declare, upon my honor, the way that fellow talked about women has made my very blood boil. I begged of Miss

Alton not to marry him (I knew he was bent on having her), and I thought my remonstrance had been successful. But she accepted him, and I went away. Once after her marriage I met her in London, and Clayton took her away from the ball because she was engaged to dance with me. Had I known she was in Paris, I would not have come—still less had I known her husband was away; though I swear to you, Hastings, upon my honor as a gentleman, not an allusion to former times has passed between us, nor a word that might not have been uttered in her husband's presence. I don't think she cares a rush for me now, except as an old friend—and, upon my soul, I hope she does not! I would have gone away ten days ago, but I could not bear to see you always with her, and to think it possible that you might care less faithfully for her good name than I have done."

CHAPTER XIV.

VAIN REGRETS.

THERE was a strange bewilderment of feeling in Mr. Hastings' mind on being taken to task by the very man whom in his own mind he had accused of being guilty of what he was himself now taxed with. He had made it his business to keep constantly close to Mrs. Clayton, to ward off, as an old friend was justified in doing, any slander that her renewed intimacy with Colonel d'Aguilar might give rise to; and lo! his good intentions were mistaken, and he stood there a very wolf in sheep's clothing! He certainly felt a little disgusted.

"Well, D'Aguilar," he said, after a pause, "as there has been so much plain speaking already, it may hardly be amiss to continue it a little. I will give you the fair, honest truth. I know that you had loved Miss Alton before she married Clayton, and most of the English here know it too. I have been intimate with her since she was a child; and, as an old friend, I thought I was acting a brother's part toward her in trying, by my own constant presence, to avert the ill-natured shafts of scandal our countrywomen know so well how to level. It appears my honorable intentions have been misinterpreted (a not unfrequent occurrence), and public opinion has assigned me a position I am very undesirous of occupying."

"Hastings!" exclaimed Colonel D'Aguilar, "have you in truth no other feeling than friendship for Mrs. Clayton?"

"Certainly not," was the rejoinder, albeit somewhat abruptly given.

"Then we have each been mistaken. If your sole reason for being always with her was the desire to protect her from my presence, I pledge you my word of honor to avoid her as long as I remain in Paris."

"I can not avoid her without exciting remark," said Errol; "but I can leave Paris, which I am heartily sick of. I have a proposal to make to you, D'Aguilar. Come and spend a few weeks with me at my place in Hirstshire. I want to have it put in order again, for I mean to settle down and live the rest of my life there. I am sick to death of traveling."

Colonel d'Aguilar assented gladly. I am not altogether sure he would have done so with such alacrity, had it not occurred to him how much more desirable it was not to leave Mr. Hastings behind him in Paris.

They agreed to excuse themselves from all their standing engagements, and to start for England the following evening.

"I shall call on Mrs. Clayton before I go," said Errol; "have you any message?"

"No, none," replied Colonel d'Aguilar, with a twinge of jealousy.

"Then we shall meet at the station to-morrow, or rather to-night. Good-bye for the present."

And they shook hands.

We are all liable to form hasty determinations on the impulse of the moment, and to regret them as soon as they are made.

As Mr. Hastings walked up the steps of his hotel, he felt that in the last few minutes he had committed a Quixotism, and he was annoyed with himself accordingly. He remembered, now it was too late, that it would be very awkward for him to leave Paris at such a short notice, and that he had one or two engagements he was very much disgusted at being called upon to give up. To leave agreeable society, great entertainments, and, above all, a pretty woman, toward whom he felt pleasantly sentimental, to satisfy the caprice of another man, was certainly an egregious act of folly. But it was impossible to draw back now, and, throw-

ing the end of his cigar away with an angry, impatient gesture, he betook himself to his room to sleep.

At noon of the same day he was ushered into Mrs. Clayton's presence, as she sat at her late breakfast.

"You are surprised to see me again so soon, are you not?" he laughed; "it is barely ten hours since we parted."

"I am very glad to see you," she answered. "The mornings are so dull always; but you see I contrive to shorten the time as much as possible."

"I have come to wish you good-bye."

"To wish me good-bye!" Mrs. Clayton repeated in blank dismay. "You did not tell me last night you were going away."

"I only made up my mind after we parted."

"I wish you would not go," Fee said, pettishly; "it will be so dull."

Mr. Hastings was more than ever annoyed that he had allowed himself to be led into making such an absurd promise.

"I go against my own inclination, I assure you. I shall not soon forget the pleasure of this visit to Paris."

"Then why do you go?" she asked. "Are you not your own master?"

"I ought to be," thought Errol; but he only said, "On this occasion, unfortunately, I am not. Business calls me to England. By the way, D'Aguilar goes with me."

He watched her narrowly as he spoke, but she betrayed no emotion.

"He might have paid me the compliment of coming to make his adieus," she said lightly.

"And I might have saved myself the trouble of watching them so constantly," thought Errol; "she does not care a rush for him."

Which reflection I transcribe as a proof of the unerring sagacity of human judgment.

"And you are going to that dear old place of yours, Hazell Court?"

"Yes, I hope to be there very soon. I have just telegraphed them to expect me."

There was some further conversation, and then Mr. Hastings rose to leave.

"You won't forget to come and see us in town, will you?"

"I hope to call on you there very soon. When are you likely to return to London?"

"I can not say positively, but I should think in three weeks at the furthest. And remember, I shall have a very charming friend to introduce to you, but I think Francis said you knew her. Never mind, it shall be a reintroduction. I know you will admire her, and she sings divinely. Stay, I will see if you recollect her; and Mrs. Clayton opened a velvet case which stood on the table, and showed him an exquisite full-length miniature of a pale, graceful girl, in deep mourning. He looked so intently at it, and held it so long, that Mrs. Clayton smiled a little wonderingly.

"I should think you admired her already," she said.

"I do!" was Errol's brief answer, but he did not even yet take his eyes from the picture. A flood of memory rushed into his mind; once again he was in love with the young, graceful, beautiful-eyed girl. But she was not quite the same; there was a sad, wistful expression in the brown eyes, a look that he had long ago pictured to himself would come there if she loved and suffered. "She is more than ever my ideal of Enone," he thought. His eyes still lingered on the picture. He would have given anything he possessed to take it away and keep it.

Presently he closed the case, and laid it down.

"Do you recognize it?" Mrs. Clayton asked.

"Perfectly. Miss Eyre is very little altered; the expression, perhaps, is scarcely so arch and bright as it used to be."

"But she is improved for all that," Fee interrupted; "she is more graceful, more self-possessed. She is wonderfully admired, but she has grieved so for her father that until the last few months she refused to go anywhere. Lady Grace is anxious to introduce her next season, but she would not hear of it when I last saw her."

"Can I execute any commission for you in London?" asked Errol, as he took leave.

"Give my love to aunt, if you see her, and say I hope soon to be in town. Good-bye."

When her guest had gone, Fee wheeled her chair round to the fire, and sat down to think. She wanted to persuade herself that she was glad and thankful Colonel d'Aguilar was going—that she should not see him again. If a few

hot tears oozed through her jeweled fingers into her lap, are there not tears of joy as well as of sorrow?

Fee wanted to do her duty—wanted with all her might. If Francis Clayton had been a little kind and forbearing to her, she would never have suffered a thought even to be false to him. But he was cruel, tyrannical, and suspicious, and—well! she almost hated him. Now and then she would make a great effort, and strive to be good and patient, and keep from quarreling with him; but he was so bearish and ill-tempered that her design always failed. She was making fresh resolves, as she sat looking pensively into the fire, but all of a sudden her thoughts were most unexpectedly put to flight by the abrupt entrance of her husband.

“Francis!” she exclaimed, rising and kissing him.

“Yes. I suppose you did not expect me. What a wretched fire! I am almost frozen, and the room is as cold as death. Ring the bell, and order me some lunch. Where the devil are those lazy hounds of servants? Always feeding, I suppose, and getting fat and insolent.”

“I am sorry—I have just sent them both out. James has gone to order the carriage, and Henry took a note to Madame de Saint Geran. Never mind, everything shall be right directly;” and she turned to the waiter, who entered, to order the lunch. Then she began to stir the fire, but her husband took the poker impatiently from her hand.

“You are raking it all out!” he exclaimed; and then proceeded very violently to anathematize the coals, when his own efforts did not prove more successful. However, his temper seemed to improve a little with the appearance of lunch, and Fee having helped him to cutlets, sat down opposite.

“Well, Francis, have you caught the man?”

“No, curse him!” was the savage rejoinder. “Those fools of detectives have been after him for a fortnight without obtaining the slightest clew. They suppose he escaped in his wife’s clothes, for he was a little fellow; but I’ve had my revenge on her, though I could not get at him.”

“Oh, Francis!” cried Fee, “what do you mean?”

“I turned her and her brats out in the snow at ten o’clock at night, to teach her to aid and abet her thief of a husband in swindling his employers.”

Mrs. Clayton’s hands twitched nervously.

"Where did she go?"

"Really, I did not make it my business to inquire. Not very near, you may be sure, for there is not a house within a mile."

"Oh, Francis!" cried his wife, indignantly, "how could you be so inhuman!"

He turned angrily upon her.

"Pray, Marion, don't let us have any ridiculous, sentimental airs over it. Another time, if your nerves are so exquisitely sensitive, don't ask any questions."

Fee bit her lips and was silent.

"Well, what have you been doing ever since I left? Of course you missed me terribly!"

"I have been out nearly every night—I was not home until three this morning."

"I thought you looked very pale and washed out. Was Madame de Saint Geran with you?"

"Yes, I never went anywhere alone."

"Have you had many visitors?" and he turned over the card-basket. A portentous frown gathered on his brow.

"Mr. Hastings seems to have been very kind in helping to pass the tedium of your solitary hours. Four cards of his, I see."

"Once you know you were here, and once I was out, so that I have only seen him here twice in your absence."

"And I suppose you are so ignorant of the world, that you think it quite proper for men to be coming here to see you alone."

"Don't be absurd, Francis. Why, I've known him all my life!"

"And of course the world would consider that such a satisfactory explanation!" sneered the suspicious husband.

A terrible fear seized on Fee. If he was angry and jealous about Mr. Hastings, what would he say when he knew that during his absence she had been constantly in the society of Colonel d'Aguilar? She had never fully realized her imprudence until this moment. What could she do? If she told him, he was certain to be very violent; if she concealed it, and he became aware of it, the consequences might be terrible. "It is better to get it off my mind at once," she determined.

"Mr. Hastings was here this morning, dear. He came to wish me good-bye."

"In anticipation of my return, I suppose."

"Really, Francis, I have scarcely common patience with you. What a poor opinion you must have of yourself, to be so suspicious! Mr. Hastings is going to England on business, and Colonel d'Aguilar is going with him."

"D'Aguilar!" cried Francis Clayton, starting, "has he been here?"

"Yes."

"How long?"

"About a fortnight or three weeks."

"And you have met him?"

"Yes."

"And spoken to him?"

"Yes."

"And danced with him?"

"I plead guilty to that also," answered Fee, trying to speak gayly. She was accustomed to violent outbursts from her husband, but the passionate violence he gave way to on this occasion surpassed anything she had ever witnessed.

He said such terrible things to her, that, trembling, frightened, as she was, her indignation was greater. She walked straight up to him.

"How dare you use such words to me!" she cried.

"How dare you utter your foul, base-minded suspicions before me! I would not lower myself so much in my own eyes as to attempt to justify my conduct. You are a poor, miserable tyrant, with whom it is impossible for a woman to live and retain her self-respect. I will not stop under the same roof with you another hour. From this moment I leave you," and she swept toward the door. But he was there before her, and stood with his back against it, to prevent her egress.

"I forbid you to leave this house!"

"Henceforward you have no authority over my actions," his wife replied, coldly. "I leave Paris to-night."

"Then you go without servants or clothes."

"Be it so! I care not how, but go I will."

He saw that she was resolved, and he was afraid of her. He tried to justify himself—to make up the quarrel; she would not hear a word. Then he apologized, humbly, abjectly; and at last she consented to receive his *amende*. Their misery was sealed from that hour. How could a man

with a mind like Clayton's ever pardon a woman who had so humiliated him?

Mrs. Clayton insisted on leaving Paris and spending a week with her aunt, before they went to their own house in town; so a few days afterward the unhappy pair bade adieu to their friends, and started in apparent amity for England. Meantime Fee, who was very tender-hearted, and had suffered much uneasiness of mind on account of her husband's cruelty to the bailiff's poor wife, had written to Lady Marion, begging her to ascertain privately the woman's circumstances, and to relieve her present distress, and make some provision for her and her children in the future. "Dearest auntie," concluded the letter, "I am so unhappy, so utterly wretched; but I will not trust my trouble to a letter, for I shall be with you in a few days at furthest, and then I will tell you everything. Ah! if I had never left you!"

CHAPTER XV.

A HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF.

THE Champions were perhaps not the most united family in the world. Mr. Champion was proverbially indifferent to his wife; Sir Howard and his grandchildren had perpetual altercations; and, latterly, Mrs. Champion and her daughter seemed far less attached to each other than formerly. Flora Champion was unhappy and discontented. Her aim in life was to make a brilliant marriage, and she had failed. It is just possible to bear failure, if others have not been aware of or shared our hopes, or if they try by kindly sympathy to make our mortification less keen; but to be reproached and taunted with our want of success is a sharp sting even to a noble mind. As we know, Flora Champion had not a noble mind; she was arrogant, jealous, and revengeful. Her grandfather's sarcasms and her mother's lamentations almost maddened her; she forgot the respect she owed to them, and was insolent and sullen. Scenes between her and Sir Howard were of frequent occurrence, and even her mother no longer took her part. She quarreled constantly with her brother, and the last and crowning part of her mortification was that he had fallen desperately in love with Winifred Eyre, and was perpetually

singing her praises. When Mr. Eyre died, Sir Howard had gone to the Farm and offered to take Winifred to the Manor. But she refused—not bitterly, not angrily, but firmly. “Thank you,” she said, “I am sure you mean kindly. You despised and slighted my dear, dear father when he was alive” (and her sobs almost choked her), “and I will not accept anything at your hands now.” And Sir Howard, instead of being displeased and offended, was rather gratified by an independence of spirit which he considered due to the blue blood she inherited from the Champions.

“I will not press you, my dear,” he said, with a gentleness by no means habitual to him; “perhaps some day you will think better of it, and remember your grandfather will always be glad to see you.” Poor child, she had thought once that to be acknowledged and noticed by Sir Howard was the summit of human bliss; now she scarcely noticed it, or, remarking it, was totally unmoved by it. How often we get what we have prayed and toiled and longed for, when it has lost its value in our eyes!

Gifted as I am, as a narrator, with the power of discerning motives and impulses of the human mind, I have never positively arrived at a conclusion as to the influence at work in Sir Howard’s heart, that prompted him to speak and act upon this occasion in the way he did. He was not a good-hearted man, but I should prefer to think that for once in his selfish, tyrannical life, he was moved by the feelings of tenderness and pity. He took his granddaughter’s hand in his and stroked it gently.

“My dear,” he said, “I regret now the long enmity that I entertained toward your poor father. I could wish that he had not gone to his grave unreconciled to me. It was my fault, and I am willing now to make what atonement I can for it. I shall follow his funeral myself on Friday.”

And he was as good as his word, and not only astonished the neighborhood by his own attendance, but insisted on his son and grandson paying the same respect to the dead body of the man whom they had persistently scorned and slighted in life, and whose poor, inanimate clay could not be honored or appeased by any courtesy that might be shown it now.

He did more—he raised a handsome marble slab to the memory of his daughter’s husband. For years and years he had banished every thought of his disobedient child.

Now he remembered once again that he had loved her. He had taken a great fancy to Winifred. He saw that she was graceful, and amiable, and lady-like, and altogether very much more lovable than her cousin Flora. Flora had certainly never been amiable, but still the old man had been fond and proud of her; but now she was becoming so insolent and overbearing, that her presence was a constant source of irritation and vexation to him. And Sir Howard had not lost his old ambition. He wanted to see one of his grandchildren well married, to keep up the dignity and importance of the family. His hopes had been set on Flora, but she had disappointed them; and it seemed as though this young chit of a girl, whom hitherto he had not condescended to notice, had had the very men at her feet whom his proud, well-born grandchild had compassed every end to win. He knew Lord Harold Erskine had proposed to Winifred, and although he had no certain knowledge of anything having passed between her and Mr. Hastings, he entertained very shrewd suspicions on the matter. The only thing that puzzled him was, what on earth could have induced her to throw away such golden opportunities, and he half feared some low, romantic attachment. If he could have her under his own roof, something might be done; but at present it seemed hopeless, for no inducement would persuade her to accept his offer of adoption. He had not only proposed to take her into his family, and give her the advantages her cousin enjoyed, but also to provide for her handsomely.

Meantime Winifred very gratefully accepted another offer that was made to her. The moment kind Lady Grace heard of her young friend's trouble she came to her and wanted to take her away to Endon Vale at once. But no persuasion could induce Winifred to leave the Farm until after the funeral, and even then she clung to her old friend, Mme. de Montolieu, and could not bear the thought of leaving her. But Lady Grace was bent on having the girl, whom she had come to care for very dearly. "I have a large house," she said, "and we are very dull all alone. I have made up my mind that you shall come and live with us. It would break poor madame's heart to lose you, and I know you would be unhappy at leaving her—let us try and persuade her to come too."

Madame was obstinate at first. She thanked Lady Grace

very much, but she had grown used to her solitary life, and was attached to her home. She hoped to die there—she was too old to change now. Lady Grace used every possible argument; madame should have her own rooms; should do precisely as she pleased; should not be called upon to see more society than was strictly agreeable to her—should, in fact, enjoy as much quiet and privacy as she did now. Still the old lady was inexorable.

“Dear madame,” said Lady Grace, at length, “do you remember that by your refusal you are injuring the prospects of her whom you profess to love, and whom I am sure you do love very dearly? She is a child now—all her life is before her. It is everything to her future whether she passes the best years of her life in unchanging monotony here, or whether she comes to me, and is placed in a position where she will have the opportunity of forming ties that may make her life both happy and brilliant. You know she will not consent to be separated from you.”

Mme. de Montolieu yielded, and in doing so added the crowning act to her long life of unselfishness and self-sacrifice. She stayed a month longer at the cottage, and Winifred remained with her. Before Christmas they were both installed at Endon Vale; the cottage was let, and the Farm about to be sold. When everything was settled, Winifred found herself in possession of two hundred a year, at which Lady Grace was well pleased. “It will make her feel less dependent on us,” thought the amiable woman.

To return to Flora Champion. The retribution which her conduct toward Mr. Vane deserved, had overtaken her. He was Lord Lancing now; his father had been dead six months, and he was as indifferent to her as she had formerly been to him. And, worse than all, their positions were reversed, and she was in love with him, to her own bitterness and mortification. She tried first to win him back, and when that failed, she strove, with all her strength of will, to master her unrequited attachment. Lord Lancing never slighted her—he was far too generous-minded for that; he paid her the same attention in public that he had always done, and was ever ready to obey her commands, or minister, as much as possible, to her wishes. But he never, as long as he lived, uttered another word of love to her. He was kind and tender to her, for the sake of olden times,

but a brave, generous heart like his could never again love a woman who had been capable of such coldness and cruelty.

"Evelyn," she said, softly, to him one day, when they were alone, "you do not care for me now."

He only smiled; and said, "You taught me the folly of my presumption, and I have never forgotten the severity of the lesson."

Tears stood in her proud eyes.

"I was mad!—I did not mean it!—indeed, Evelyn, I did not. Will you not forgive me?"

"With all my heart, Flora. I ought to thank you for a cruelty that, after all, was perhaps a kindness in disguise. Come and play croquet."

Miss Champion bit her lips, and went without another word. There would have been some hope if he had been angry and reproached her; there was none now.

"Flora," exclaimed her mother, petulantly, the same evening, "I think it is time something definite was settled between you and Lord Lancing. You have played with him quite long enough."

Miss Champion was silent.

"Flora, do you hear me?"

"Yes, mamma."

"You do not seem likely now to make a better match; you have been through another season without a single good offer, and, after all, I see nothing to object to in him."

Mrs. Champion paused for an answer, but not obtaining any, she turned to her daughter, irritably.

"I say I see nothing to object to in him."

"Nor do I."

"Then why don't you accept him?"

"For the best of reasons," Flora answered, pressing her heel into the soft velvet carpet; "because he has not asked me."

"Nonsense, Flora; you know you have only to give the least sign, and he would be at your feet directly."

"I know that if I asked him point-blank to marry me, he would refuse," Flora answered, bitterly.

"What makes you say that?" her mother asked, quickly.

"Because I am convinced that he no longer cares for me. Please say no more about it, mamma. When he

cared for me, I would not have him; now that I care for him, he will not have me."

"You do not mean to say, Flora, that you really care for him?"

"I mean to say nothing," was the sharp rejoinder; "pray spare me any further comments on my unfortunate love affairs."

"You have managed them disgracefully," said Mrs. Champion, querulously; "a girl of your appearance and opportunities to be still unmarried at two-and-twenty—it really is heart-breaking!"

"I wish I was married, if it was only to be rid of this perpetual match-making and quarreling!" cried Flora, impetuously.

"Really, Flora, your temper is becoming unbearable," rejoined her mother. "It is you who cause all the discussion. You are disagreeable to me, insolent to your grandfather, and overbearing with your brother. Your forehead is becoming quite wrinkled with frowning; and I never see a smile on your face unless Lord Lancing is here. I do wish you would make an effort to be on good terms with Sir Howard. I am sure you would gain much more by it. He seems quite bent on having that Winifred Eyre here, and is constantly writing to Lady Grace Farquhar about her. Yesterday, after your quarrel with him, he declared he would adopt her, if she would only consent to it, he was so sick of your temper. And I am persuaded of this, that if you come to any open rupture with Sir Howard, your papa will insist on your going to Scotland and remaining there."

"I should not mind in the least," said Flora, indifferently. "I could not be duller or more miserable than I am here."

"And you would like that artful, intriguing girl to take your place, I suppose, and curry favor with your grandpapa, and be introduced at Court, and go to balls, and spend his money, while you were banished to the wilds of Scotland? Come, Flora, do be sensible, and make an effort." And Flora thought she would, and was very amiable and pleasant to her grandpapa all that evening; but the next day things went wrong again, and the breach was widened.

Reginald came in at lunch-time; he had just ridden over

from Endon Vale, where he had dined and slept. He was particularly fond of going to see his cousin, and as Winifred liked him, and he made himself very agreeable, Lady Grace often invited him. He came in looking rather lachrymose and woe-begone.

"Well, Sir Knight of the doleful countenance, I fear your suit has scarcely been a prosperous one," sneered his sister.

"Then you can sympathize with me, Flo," retorted Reginald. "Our family, you know, are not very successful at match-making."

"Come, come," interposed Mrs. Champion, "do try if you can not meet for once without wrangling. How is Lady Grace, Reggy?"

"Oh, she wasn't very well, and Sir Clayton was at his everlasting manuscripts, so Winifred came eight miles of the way with me."

"Has she learned to ride yet, then?" asked Flora, scornfully.

"I should think she has. You should just see her leap; like a rock she sits! Oh, Erskine was a capital master," added Reginald, spitefully. "And she drives, too, I can tell you. By Jove! she manages those ponies well. I went a drive with her yesterday. She is so fond of being out of doors, and Lady Grace will make her ride and drive. She says it braces her nerves."

"Ah! that must be very necessary!" sneered Flora.

"I can tell you it is so, too. She looks a little better now, but she was just like a ghost before, and hardly ever smiled."

"A pleasant companion, I should think."

"A deal pleasanter than you, Flora. At all events, *she* is always kind and good-tempered, which is more than your best friend could say of you."

"Ah!" returned his sister, "but to the point—has she refused you, that you wear this air of interesting melancholy?"

"Yes, she has," cried Reginald, savagely. "The same as she refused Erskine and Hastings."

"I never heard that either of them proposed to her," said Miss Champion, frowning.

"Then I can have the pleasure of assuring you that they both did," Reginald retorted. It was a pure speculation on

that young gentleman's part, but he liked to console himself with the thought that he had been rejected in good company. "I'm not sure," he added, intent on provoking his sister, "that Lancing did not ask her too."

Miss Champion raised her blue eyes scornfully.

"I thought you were telling a falsehood before," she said; "now I know it."

"Silence!" thundered Sir Howard, at this juncture. "Your bickerings drive me mad. I wish to Heaven your cousin was here, and that you were both a hundred miles off."

"Why do you not have her here, then, grandpapa?" said Flora, provokingly.

"Because she has too much sense to come," snarled the baronet. "I do not wonder at her refusal, if you and your brother made yourselves as agreeable at Lady Grace Farquhar's as you do at home."

"Perhaps, if you sent us away, she might consent to come!" sneered Flora.

"I should not advise you to say too much about that, young lady," answered Sir Howard, "or I may chance to take you at your word. Gad! it would seem like heaven to have a nice, sweet-tempered girl in the house, after a vixen like you!"

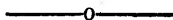
"Perhaps she has been brought up amongst pleasanter influences than I have," suggested Flora. "Her father may have been nothing but a country farmer, but perhaps he was pleasant to live with. Good temper sometimes makes up for good breeding."

Sir Howard almost foamed with rage at his granddaughter's insolence. He thundered out a volley of oaths, which frightened poor Mrs. Champion, but made not the slightest impression on her unsusceptible daughter.

Things went on pretty much in the same way up to the period at which our story has arrived. Latterly, Flora had been away visiting at several great houses. She was like a good many people who are essentially disagreeable at home—she could be very pleasant and amiable in society. Her rancor against Winifred Eyre was relentless—she could scarcely bear to hear her cousin's name mentioned; and when she was told, on credible authority, that Lady Grace intended bringing her out the following season, her anger and jealousy knew no bounds. To think that the farmer's

daughter, the offspring of the great *mésalliance* in their family, should be introduced to society under more favorable auspices than even she herself had been! The notion was intolerable. They would meet perhaps often, and the fresh, young novice in her first season would eclipse her.

"I *will* marry!" Flora vowed to herself, "and marry well. I shall never love any one but Evelyn, and he does not care for me now. If a man as old as my grandfather asks me to be his wife, and he has rank and wealth, I will take him. Surely I have still beauty enough to buy love?" and Flora Champion looked proudly into the long mirror before which she was standing.



PART THIRD.



CHAPTER I.

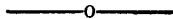
"I WILL NEVER FORGIVE YOU."

I HAVE purposely passed by the period of Winifred Eyre's grief for her father. In a novel, one is not justified in dwelling on details unless they be startling, sensational, or deeply harrowing. Winifred's sorrow was bitter and passionate. At first she could not sleep or eat for it, and she became so pale and hollow-eyed, that her friends feared for her. They could not win a smile to her lips—nothing seemed to amuse or interest her. Lady Grace took her to an eminent physician, and he pronounced her nervous system to be terribly shaken, and prescribed change of scene and as much fresh air as possible. In accordance with this opinion, Lady Grace insisted on her riding and driving constantly; and when the spring came, they went on a tour through Wales. Later on, Sir Clayton fancied a few months' foreign travel, and that did more toward renovating Winifred's health and spirits than any previous change. Ah! what a blessed consoler is Time, more especially to the young! How vehement—how buoyant is youth!—how it enjoys!—how it despairs!—how it forgets!

Winifred was no longer unhappy. She had not forgotten the old tie that had been snapped so rudely, but others had

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He was too much in love to be a good tactician, or he would have seen the danger of his allusion. Who does not know what the sight of a face one has loved will do, even after the lapse of years? In the first moment of Errol Hastings' presence, all the old feelings her love for him had given birth to revived—the admiration that had almost accounted to hero-worship, and then the passionate indignation and reproach. If he had forborne any reference to what she considered a terrible insult, and spoken only of his love for her, she might have forgiven him there and then, but the very words that were in themselves an effort to propitiate her, roused all the depths of her long slumbering pride and anger.

"I will never forgive you!" she cried, the passionate tears welling into her eyes, and she swept past him and left the room.

Mr. Hastings stamped with futile anger on the ground.

"How could I be such a cursed fool?—such a scoundrel!" he muttered between his teeth. "I have lost all hope of this girl, whom I would rather have for my wife than the proudest princess in Europe."

A few months back he had fancied that he had forgotten her; the sight of her portrait in Paris had revived the old memory, and now that he had seen her again more graceful, more womanly than in the olden days, he felt he loved, and should love her, more than ever.

Two months had passed since his return to Hazell Court, and until this day he had never been able to summon up sufficient courage to ride over to Endon Vale. Lady Grace was an old friend; she would expect him, unless, indeed, she knew what had passed between him and Miss Eyre, and that she did was scarcely probable.

His reflections were cut short by the entrance of Lady Grace. She was very glad to see him; asked him why he had not been over before, and a thousand questions about his travels. They had been talking some twenty minutes, when the door opened, and to his surprise Miss Eyre entered, with an air of perfect unconcern. Lady Grace, evidently not knowing they had seen each other that day, introduced them. They bowed coldly.

"Though I think you have met before?" her ladyship remarked interrogatively.

"Mr. Hastings called once at the Farm to see my father

about something. We did not meet as equals," and she gave him a defiant flash of her proud eyes.

Lady Grace looked up in intense surprise; she had never heard her favorite speak in such a bitter tone. "Perhaps," she thought, "Mr. Hastings was a little abrupt to her, and she is very sensitive." Winifred was vexed at her own want of self-control. In her anxiety to conceal her secret, she had come down-stairs again, that Lady Grace might not suspect anything; and now by her hasty words she had half-betrayed herself. Had she remained upstairs, her absence would have been noticed; perhaps she might be sent for, and then some sort of explanation must ensue. I am not altogether sure, either, that there was some desire to be in the presence of the man whom she declared to herself she hated and condemned. Her ladyship pressed Mr. Hastings to dine and stay the night at Endon Vale, but he pleaded an engagement at home. She insisted, however, on his taking lunch before departing, and to that he consented. Gladly enough would he have accepted her invitation in full, but that he was too proud to force his presence on a girl to whom it was apparently so distasteful. During lunch his hostess discussed her projects for the coming season.

"I am about to appear in a new *rôle*," she said, with a kind glance at Winifred; "that of chaperon. I am going to bring out my adopted daughter, and I trust she will not disappoint my expectations."

"Miss Eyre will, I doubt not, more than realize the fondest anticipations," said Mr. Hastings, and Lady Grace perceived that there was no scorn or covert irony in his words.

"Sir Clayton has taken a house in Eaton Square for the season," she continued; "we propose to commence occupying it in a fortnight. I hope we shall see you constantly, Mr. Hastings."

"I shall be very glad," assented Errol. "I propose to be in town a good deal, and have taken a set of rooms in Piccadilly."

Sir Clayton's voice made itself heard at this juncture, almost for the first time.

"Are you going back to the Court this afternoon, Hastings?"

Errol answered in the affirmative.

"Then Miss Eyre and I will bear you company part of the way. We have ordered the horses for three o'clock."

Winifred bit her lip with vexation; and Mr. Hastings saw it, and would have excused himself had it been possible.

The horses came round; he offered to mount her.

"No, thank you," she said, coldly; "I like to be put up by some one whose skill I have tested."

She seemed to delight in wounding him. She kept persistently on the other side of Sir Clayton, and scarcely spoke. Presently they came to a gate, from which the two top railings had been broken.

"Come, Winifred," said Sir Clayton, "there is a capital piece of practice for you." The groom had gone up to unfasten it. "Don't open it, Mason!" shouted the baronet, "Miss Eyre is going to leap it."

And Winifred immediately put her horse at it, and was over in a moment.

"Does she not sit well?" Sir Clayton asked triumphantly, turning to his companion. "Harold Erskine taught her to ride.

Errol's reply was a shade less enthusiastic than it would have been if the last sentence had been unspoken. But, nevertheless, he admired the graceful figure very ardently and genuinely. When they parted Sir Clayton pressed him to dine there the following week. Before he answered, he looked at Winifred, whose gaze was fixed blankly in the distance.

"I will make her love me!" he vowed impatiently, and he accepted the invitation.

She had scarcely looked at him as he wished her good-bye, and he turned on his way homeward chafing and angry.

"What a handsome, manly fellow that is!" ejaculated Sir Clayton, as he looked after the retreating figure.

"Do you think so?" Winifred answered indifferently.

The human heart is certainly inscrutable. Will any one believe from her conduct toward him that this girl was more deeply in love than ever with the man whom she affected to disdain? The sight of him had brought back all the vivid admiration she had formerly felt for him—not one phrase of their past meetings was forgotten. But her pride would not let her love and forgive. She must

make him feel her humiliation, and suffer her pangs. There was a sense of triumph and exultation in her heart at the thought that he still cared for her and that she had power to wound him. She crushed down all the gentle and tender thoughts which tried to assert themselves.

"He might think meanly of me," she thought, "if I forgave the past, and seemed glad of his love."

And then she banished her thoughts, and turned to answer Sir Clayton.

"I think," remarked the baronet, reflectively—"I think if ever I am tempted to write another novel, I shall make Hastings my hero."

"Would you imagine the circumstances of his life, sir, or make researches for an authentic history?" Winifred asked with occult meaning.

"Oh, I should draw my own imagination," smiled Sir Clayton; "unless you, who were such a near neighbor, could give me a little private information about him."

"What should farmers' daughters know of the inner life of such great men as Mr. Hastings?" asked Winifred, with a curling lip.

"What! Winifred, you sarcastic!" exclaimed Sir Clayton, turning to look at her.

She colored, and he changed the subject, wondering a little at her embarrassment.

"Why do you not write something, Winifred?"

The girl laughed.

"I used to write poetry and historical essays when I was about fourteen, but I have been so ashamed on reading them since that I should never have courage to try again. Besides, I have plenty of occupation in copying for you, and looking out the references."

"Small beginnings lead to great results," replied the baronet, pompously. "*I commenced with rhymes as a boy, which I should be sorry to own now.*"

From which it may be inferred the gentleman had a tolerably good opinion of himself. But Winifred was not disposed to be quizzical or contemptuous in her thoughts of people who had been good to her, and she admired all his writings very candidly, and thought him exceedingly clever, in spite of a little occasional prosiness.

They then cantered homeward, Sir Clayton insisting on Winifred taking all the leaps they came to, by way of

practice. He had grown very fond and proud of her in the last few months—she had such pretty, winning manners, and seemed always so glad to be of use to him. She understood his wishes by intuition. If he wanted her help, immediately her book or work was laid aside, and she was at his service, either to read, copy, refer, or write.

“If you were older, or Sir Clayton younger,” Lady Grace used to say sometimes with her pleasant smile, “I should be inclined to be a little jealous; but as it is, I feel as if you were our daughter. You are just the age, you know, my dear.”

And then she would turn away with a sigh at the remembrance of her little ones, who were lying far away in foreign graves.

On her return from the ride, Winifred went, as was her custom, to the little sitting-room appropriated to the use of Mme. de Montolieu. Lady Grace was sitting there too. She kissed them both.

“You bring the outer air in with you, my child,” said the old French lady; “you are as fresh as a new-picked rose.”

“We have had a good canter across the common, dear madame—it makes one feel fresh. Did you both have a pleasant drive?”

“Yes,” said Lady Grace, “and I find you have got the ponies into such order that they are as quiet as lambs. At least Evans gives you all the credit.”

“Then it is only fair that I should return the compliment,” laughed Winifred. “Exercise has a great deal more to do with it than I have, and I saw one of the grooms out with them at eight o’clock this morning.”

“He wants to see you drive them in the Park,” resumed Lady Grace; “he says with a new set of harness, and you in the front seat (himself behind, I presume), there would not be a more elegant ‘turn out’ in London.”

“Fancy such honor and state for a farmer’s daughter?” said Winifred, half grave, half ironical.

Lady Grace took her hand, and drew her toward herself.

“My dear, what ails you to-day? You are not like yourself. I never heard you say these things before. Has Mr. Hastings anything to do with it? Your manner to him was most chilling. Did he ever offend you?”

“Offend me? Lady Grace—how should he? He was far above me when we met before.”

But her voice trembled, and she hurried from the room.

“Madame,” said Lady Grace, “can you throw any light on the subject—do you know if anything ever passed between them that should make her seem proud and resentful toward him?”

Mme. de Montolieu hesitated.

“I should not feel justified in telling this to any one else; but you have her interest as much at heart as I have. The summer before last, when he first came home, they met by accident. He was handsome and fascinating, and, I believe, the first man of *ton* and breeding she ever met with. No wonder, then, the poor romantic child fell in love with him. Somehow they met again, and he made an excuse to call at the Farm, and she was at home alone. I dare say he took a fancy to her, large-eyed, graceful child as she was, and flattered and talked to her as men of the world will. She mistook it for love—for a romantic devotion, no doubt, such as her foolish little brain had conceived might be possible between a great gentleman like the master of Hazell Court, and her own humble self. I warned her—I wanted to spare her the heart-ache—the misery that such a delusion might cause her; but, poor child! she was so honest, so true herself, she could not believe the man she worshiped as a hero could be capable of what she deemed baseness (so little did she know the ways of the world), and at last, by a cruel lesson—I am not at liberty to tell you how—she found that, while he was feigning love for her, he was, in truth, devoting his real attention to her cousin Flora. It was a grievous blow, that discovery. I doubt she has never forgiven him yet. Perhaps his presence brought back a bitter remembrance, and she involuntarily resented what she deemed his inconsiderate cruelty.”

“I can not understand it,” Lady Grace said. “Twice to-day I saw him look at her as I should have fancied a man could only look when he loved a woman dearly. And yet—you may be right, for I remember fancying there was a tinge of regret in his expression.”

The two women sat thinking, without exchanging another word, until the door opened, and Winifred came in smiling. It will be seen, from the foregoing conversa-

tion, how entirely ignorant Mme. de Montolieu was of what had really taken place between Winifred and Mr Hastings. All the trouble and distress in which she had seen the young girl, she had imputed to the despair with which the ball-room scene had filled her. That was what she believed the cruel lesson to have been; she never guessed how far deeper had been the wound which rankled so long. Had she known all, even her charity would have been insufficient to pardon what her pride and purity of thought would have deemed the wanton betrayal of tender innocence.

CHAPTER II.

YOU DID NOT SING FOR ME.

SIR CLAYTON'S passion for scribbling had rather increased than decreased during the last twelve months, for two of his articles had found favor in the eyes of the editor of a magazine, and had been published, greatly to the pride and joy of their author. He had just finished what he considered a highly entertaining and instructive sketch of the celebrities of Louis the Fourteenth's reign, in which due prominence was given to the literary characters. In this work he was unable to avail himself to the usual extent of his young companion's services, for several of the chronicles to which he had occasion to refer were of such a doubtful nature, as to be unsuited to the perusal of a young lady. The scenes and jests of Scarron's supper-table, his profligate wit and coarse epigrams, the stories of Louis's mistresses, amongst them the unhappy Louise la Valliere and Athenee de Montespan (the victim of a husband's proud confidence), the gallantries of the handsome courtiers, the mad passion of Racine for the actress Champmede, for which he performed the tremendous penance of foregoing all the success that awaited him in the dramatic world as the successor of Corneille; the wit, the wickedness, the splendor, the coarseness—all these were unfit for the study of a young girl, and here Lady Grace's services were called into requisition. For some months past, Winifred had almost completely taken Lady Grace's post of reader and amanuensis, which was not only a very great relief to the former, but an amusement to herself. She had been

so much with Sir Clayton, and received so much of his confidence, that she had come to consider him in the light that he evidently considered himself—a great and unappreciated genius. She read all his essays and sketches, both printed and manuscript, and admired them genuinely. She was not deep enough herself to be aware that he was essentially superficial. If he had given to one subject the attention and study he frittered over twenty, he might have achieved a good result; but he wearied over a long work, and was always in a hurry to complete and recommence. An essay, a poem, a novel, a critique, a magazine article, all took his fancy in turn, and whatever was on hand must suffer a hasty and ineffective completion, to give place to the new idea. An imitation of a Greek play was the last thing which had inspired his changeful mood, and at present he was perpetually engaged in Sapphic odes and the study of metres. The morning after Mr. Hastings' visit, Winifred ran into the library, as usual, to assist the baronet in his literary labors.

"Well, sir," she exclaimed, gayly, "how does the work progress? Have you reduced your troublesome metres to subordination?"

"Partially so, my dear—partially so," returned Sir Clayton, with inward satisfaction; "but you shall judge for yourself. Do me the favor to read this over aloud; or stay, perhaps you might have some difficulty in reading my crabbed writing, and any hesitation would mar the softness of the rhythm. I will read it to you myself;" and straightway the proud author proceeded to declaim a grand chorus of the Greek princes in the scene where Menelaus reminds them of their oath to avenge Helen's husband. Then he quoted a passage from Helen's passionate lament for the death of Paris, and her seizure by Polyxo's furies while bathing; then he turned back to his favorite scene between Paris and Helen, concluding with the following lines:

"Then to him Helen:

O Paris, my own soul! upbraid me not,
Nor weep with me in that thou see'st these tears;
Not one regret for all the past I know,
Nor count aught sorrow while thou still art near.
But for the present, for the keen disgrace,
The shame and ruin of this pleasant land,
Caused by me only. Had I ne'er known,
Or, knowing thee, used pow'r o'er my heart

To check the growing sway of passion there
To suffer, being strong, and with a will
Of iron close my eyes against thy charm,
Cold to thy God-like beauty and true wife
To Menelaus! The blood of thousands,
Slain in my unjust cause, appeals to Heaven,
While my own heart condemns me. Paris, say,
Have I no cause for tears?" "

The baronet having concluded his reading in a very impressive manner, looked up to receive his due meed of applause.

"I like it very much," Winifred said; "I don't think the severest critics could find fault with that."

Sir Clayton had not only a wholesome dread of, but a bitter animosity against, these terrible scourges of novelists. Well, after all, it is very hard to be held up to ridicule, and to be giggled over by delighted readers, who wouldn't think anything of a critique which did not cut up the poor struggling author into mince-meat.

"Bah!" exclaimed Sir Clayton, "the critics! one might have some opinion of them if one did not know that, while they make fun of you, they couldn't do better or as well themselves."

"But some of their articles are very clever," Winifred remarked.

"Bah!" said Sir Clayton again, in an energetically angry tone, and the subject was dropped by common consent.

The baronet, as we have said, had grown very fond of Winifred. He had not all at once entered into his wife's plan of adopting her, but gradually she had crept into his selfish old heart, by her winning ways and kind thoughtfulness, until he regarded her as a daughter, and was as proud and fond of her as if she had been his own child. There are two ways by which people may gain the unquestioning affection and liking of those around them—tact, and kindness of heart mixed with innate good-breeding. Winifred possessed the latter and the better of the two. Her present position was essentially calculated to improve her character. She lived with two amiable, generous-hearted women, who loved her dearly—to whose wishes it was impossible for hers to run counter, and who earned all the affection and gratitude she gladly paid them. Her

chief faults, pride, hauteur and self-will, lay dormant for the very want of opportunity to exercise them, and under these circumstances it is scarcely surprising that day by day she seemed to grow more winning and lovable. Her accomplishments were not neglected. She spoke and read French constantly with Mme. de Montolieu; daily practice was making an excellent musician of her; and, as for singing, it was impossible for that to be improved. Every night, after dinner, she sung and played in her own sweet way, passing from song to song, and melody to melody, without waiting to be thanked or asked for more. The elder ladies leaned back in their chairs and listened, oftentimes won to tears by the touching voice, and fully appreciating the double talent of memory which made the harmony flow on so softly without a break. I have known the sweetest song spoiled—the flood of tender memories that a soft voice awakened—driven back to the full heart by the turning over of a leaf. As she sung, Winifred's own thoughts came and went, but she little dreamed what far-off recollections of the olden times brought the tears to the eyes of these women, long past their youth, and in whom (had she given the matter a thought) she would have believed all such sentiment long since dead.

Sir Clayton intended that when they went to London, Winifred should have the first masters, and every advantage which money could procure. The time was drawing near for the country girl to make her *début* in London, and it must be admitted that, having once made up her mind to it, she was looking forward with some eagerness to this new phase in her life.

Lord Harold Erskine had never been to stay at Endon Vale since Winifred had lived there, and this was the only reason Lady Grace ever had to regret her presence—it kept the nephew whom she loved away. Once, when she had a letter from him, she read it, and sighed heavily as she laid it down. Winifred understood what the sigh meant. She summoned up courage the next time they were alone, and said:

"I know you are unhappy because you do not see Lord Harold, Lady Grace. Please let me go away somewhere for a time, and let him come here, if he does not like to meet me."

"I do not think, my dear, that he minds meeting you

so much, as that he fears his presence might make you uneasy."

"Oh, Lady Grace," cried Winifred, "why should you—why should he think of me? Am I not here from your kindness and charity? I was only too much honored by his ever thinking of me; but he will have forgotten me now, and why should we not meet as if such a thing had never been?"

"I will tell him," Lady Grace said; and she wrote to him that very day, begging him to come. By return of post she received his answer:

"DEAR AUNT,—The past shall be forgotten. I hope to be with you the day after to-morrow. Affectionately yours,
HAROLD ERSKINE."

The next day he arrived, to his aunt's great delight. The meeting between him and Winifred was cordial and unaffected—no one would have guessed the uncomfortable feelings which attended it. But in a day or two the restraint wore off, and they relapsed into an easy friendship; at all events, the young lady did. She rather avoided him at first, and devoted herself to Sir Clayton and Mme. de Montolieu, while the aunt and nephew went happily about together; but after that both became conscious of a desire for each other's more genial companionship, and somehow found themselves generally together. Lord Harold had vowed and sworn to himself that nothing should induce him to utter a word of love to his aunt's *protégée*, even if he fell more headlong into his passion for her than ever; and as Winifred felt a most sincere liking for him, they were both agreed and happy in their treatment of each other. Of course, as soon as Lord Harold heard his old friend Errol Hastings was at the Court, he betook himself at once to see him, although he was coming to dinner the following day.

"I shall most likely sleep at the Court to-night, aunt, and we will ride over together to-morrow morning. Of course, he stays here the night?"

"Of course, my dear;" and Lord Harold rode off. The day seemed a little dull to Winifred after he had gone. She dreaded seeing Mr. Hastings again, particularly before Lord Harold; and then she wondered if her name would

be mentioned between the two men, and if so, what they would say about her. Somehow there was a remarkable reluctance in the minds of both to speak of her to each other. Mr. Hastings had an unpleasant recollection of Mr. Clayton's remark about Miss Eyre's flirtation with Lord Harold Erskine, and an uncomfortable sense of the latter's present golden opportunities; and Lord Harold remembered uneasily that something had been said about Hastings and Miss Eyre wandering together in the Hazell woods. By common consent, then, her name was avoided as much as possible, and the two men had plenty of other topics for conversation, until the next day. The following morning, Lord Harold bethought himself of calling on the Champions, and Mr. Hastings volunteered to accompany him. They found Lord Lancing and his sister playing croquet with Flora and Reginald Champion, and on invitation joined in the game. It was curious enough that, although Flora looked handsome, and used all the arts they had once thought fascinating, both these men contrasted her unfavorably with her cousin.

"The difference between art and nature," reflected Errol.

"What a deuced deal nicer Winifred's simple ways are than this girl's airs and coquetry!" thought Lord Harold.

They accepted Mrs. Champion's invitation to lunch, and received a cordial welcome from Sir Howard, who did not altogether despair of getting one of them for a grandson-in-law.

"They won't have Flora, and the other little girl won't have them," he thought to himself. "But who knows? Women are very changeable, and so are men, too, for the matter of that."

"Lancing has his revenge now," remarked Lord Harold to his companion, as they rode out of the Manor gates.

"In what way?" asked Mr. Hastings.

"He was awfully fond of Miss Champion at one time, and she used to snub him terribly—made a sort of scape-goat of him, in fact. She cares for him now, if ever I saw a woman in love; and I can see, although he treats her with much courtesy, he is really as indifferent to her as she was to him. It seems to me people generally get paid out for abusing the tender passion," (which sapient remark rather went home to the listener.)

The two gentlemen did not arrive at Endon Vale until it was time to dress for dinner, and only just appeared in the drawing-room as the gong sounded for the second time. Sir Clayton gave his arm to the old French lady. Mr. Hastings took his hostess, and Lord Harold followed with Winifred. They sat side by side at dinner, and Errol felt as if he could scarcely take his eyes off her. She certainly looked—I was going to say very pretty, but that utterly fails to convey my meaning—she looked like the picture of graceful simplicity and elegance. I know for certain that she had bestowed unusual care upon the simple toilet which seemed so fresh and unstudied. She wore a flowing dress of the purest, softest white, cut square at the neck, and relieved by a border of black velvet, and in her hair were great Marguerites. She laughed and talked with Lord Harold, in a low, almost caressing voice, Mr. Hastings thought; and it made his blood boil.

There was an irresistible fascination for him in watching every look, every gesture of this girl whom he had last seen as the simple farmer's daughter, and who would now bear comparison with the best-bred young lady of fashionable circles. Winifred scarcely *seemed* conscious of his presence; but she knew perfectly that he was watching her, and that he felt angry and jealous. And the knowledge afforded her a secret joy, which the reader may think quite befitting a young lady who aspires to, or rather has the honor thrust upon her of being a heroine. People, young people in particular, have at times a double individuality, which causes them to do many things unintentionally, and seems to compel them to act in a manner which is not natural to them, and which neither their heart nor will approves. And this it was that caused Winifred to treat Lord Harold with a certain *empresse* manner, which delighted him inexpressibly, and to behave with a cold, stinging indifference to Mr. Hastings. Lady Grace was the only person whom her manner did not deceive; the sole thing in which her surmise was incorrect was the motive which actuated Winifred's behavior toward the two men.

Had she been less gentle and forbearing to the inexperience and touchiness of youth, less capable of understanding its heart's burnings and self-will, she might have felt angry and impatient at her *protégée's* conduct, more especially as her favorite nephew was likely to suffer by it; but she only

looked on with a gentle pitying regret, resolving, if it should become necessary, to open Harold's eyes to the truth, as tenderly as possible.

Errol had of course never heard Miss Eyre sing. When they went into the drawing-room, he said to her:

"I hear you sing very beautifully, Miss Eyre. Will you give me the pleasure of hearing your voice?"

"I do not think my singing would give you any pleasure," she answered, coldly. "You are, of course, accustomed to hear highly cultivated voices—mine is only a rude, untaught, country one."

He drew back, wounded to the quick.

"Do come and sing, Winifred," exclaimed Lord Harold.

"Curse his familiarity!" thought Errol; but he felt more bitter still when she rose to comply with the last request.

"I am not afraid of *your* judgment—you are always lenient to my country ignorance," she said to Lord Harold, flashing a defiant look on Errol as she passed him.

Sitting down to the piano, she sung her most touching, plaintive songs, one after the other, with a pathos that went to the heart of each one who listened. She never sung more beautifully than on that night, and Errol leaned against the embrasure of the window, where his face was screened from observation, and drank in every tone of the voice, which was not only beautiful in itself, but which he loved. He never loved her before or afterward as he loved her that night, listening for the first time to the exquisite tenderness of her voice. He read in it pain, suffering, reproach, and love; but love changed—not for him. If he had sinned against her wantonly and willfully, he could not have suffered a greater agony of retribution than he did during that half hour that he stood hidden by the crimson folds of the curtain, his head bent on his breast, his arms folded, and his mouth compressed with pain. It was hard to feel the mad desire, the fierce passion, and to know that but for his own act he might have had the love for which his soul craved so intensely.

When Winifred rose from the piano Lord Harold was rapturous in his applause and thanks. She thought Mr. Hastings would have come up and praised her, and shown her that he had been pleased. But he kept silence, and did not even look at her. She was chafed and angry at his

seeming indifference, and resumed her seat, begging Lord Harold to sing. He had a tolerable voice, and was only too pleased to comply with her request, as she played his accompaniment. It required the very strongest effort of Mr. Hastings' politeness to prevent his leaving the room. Lord Harold's loud voice, and somewhat tasteless style of singing, provoked him beyond endurance. When Winifred finally left the piano, she passed close to the curtain, and Errol came forward. She spoke on the impulse of the moment.

"After all, my singing was not worth your thanks."

"You did not sing for me," he answered bitterly.

CHAPTER III.

CŒUR DE LOUP.

ERROL HASTINGS, thinking over the events of the evening, found it an utter impossibility to arrive at any definite conclusion as to the feelings and motives which influenced Winifred's conduct toward him. Was his presence really hateful to her?—did she bear an unrelenting anger toward him for his unworthy treatment of her long ago?—and had every vestige of the love he knew she had once borne him died out? Was it pique or indifference to him? or was it that she loved Harold Erskine? The last idea was insupportable.

"Bah!" he thought, "I am a fool for my pains. Is it possible that, I who am to all intents and purposes a man of the world, and have gone unscathed through a score of *grandes passions*, should find myself eating my heart out for the love of a simple little country girl? To-morrow shall decide my future course of action, and if I see she does not care for me, I *will* school myself to meet her with indifference."

At breakfast the following morning both Sir Clayton and Lady Grace Farquhar pressed him to stay until the next day, and he consented.

"And now," said Lady Grace, "you young people must go for a long ride this lovely morning, and I shall shut myself up with my husband and his learned folios."

Winifred would have made some demur, but Lady Grace

was resolute, and Lord Harold went to order the horses. Winifred no longer rode the quiet old bay horse, but a handsome chestnut Sir Clayton had bought for her; and as she required no assistance in the management of him, Harold was free to ride La Fierle.

"You shall see if I am not improved," Winifred said, as she sprung from her *ci-devant* master's hand to the saddle. "Do you know, Mr. Hastings, the first time Lord Harold mounted me, he took me down again nine or ten times."

How completely circumstances may at times alter, or seem to alter, a person's whole character. Until the previous day, Winifred had never in her life been provoking or a flirt, but of course those qualities must have been dormant somewhere in her heart, or they would scarcely have cropped up like the dragon's teeth at a moment's notice. The whole ride through she flattered and flirted with Lord Harold, and uttered little malicious, biting remarks to Mr. Hastings, with the most *naïve* unconscious innocence.

"Do you remember this turning, where we went for our first ride, Lord Harold?" she would ask; and then, with a turn of the head toward Errol—"Was it not good of him, Mr. Hastings, to leave the grand ladies for an awkward country girl? But no, you would call it folly." Then she would flash a look out of her brown eyes at him that made him set his teeth hard. "This is the fence where I took my first leap," she said again presently; "I think I should have slipped off, but Lord Harold caught me."

The ride must have been fraught with considerable enjoyment for Errol, as every turning, every fence, every heath seemed to bring to Winifred's mind some agreeable reminiscence connected with her other companion. As they were nearing the Park gates, a farmer stopped Lord Harold to speak about some business, and Mr. Hastings and Winifred rode on. Errol bent down toward her presently.

"Miss Eyre, have I no hope that you will ever feel kinder toward me than you do now?"

"I have no unkind feeling toward you, Mr. Hastings."

"Then shall I say less indifferent?"

"Can one help feeling indifferent?" retorted Winifred. He turned away, stung to the quick.

Winifred kept up the same demeanor toward the two

men during the whole drive; and then at night, when she went to her room, she cried bitterly, and hated and reproached herself unreasonably.

"I do love him—I do love him!" she sobbed to herself over and over again; but the next morning she was as cold and repellent to him as ever, and would hardly wish him good-bye before he mounted and rode away.

"Come and play croquet, Winifred," cried Lord Harold, when their visitor had departed.

"No, thank you," she answered; "I must go to your uncle."

"Oh, I am sure he will excuse you this once—won't he, aunt?"

"I will not be excused," Winifred answered, quickly; "besides, I would rather a thousand times read to Sir Clayton than play croquet."

He looked at her for a moment with decided chagrin. She had been so kind and caressing in her manner to him the last day or two, that he had been quite anxious for Mr. Hastings' departure, that they might enjoy a *tête-à-tête*. But Winifred had a very conscious, guilty feeling that she had been doing wrong in seeming to encourage him, and thus determined to make amends for it by keeping out of his way. Lady Grace saw through the intention, and approved of it.

"Come out with me, Harold, and drive my ponies; I am afraid they are beyond me, now that I drive so little." And Lord Harold submitted with the best grace he could muster.

The afternoon's post-bag contained two letters in the same handwriting—one for Winifred, the other for Lady Grace. The correspondent was Mrs. Clayton.

"DEAR WINIFRED" (she wrote to the former)—"Do ask Lady Grace Farquhar to spare you to me for a week. Mr. Clayton has taken a villa on the Thames for the summer, and I am going to spend a few days there before we go to town for the season. I expect to be very dull and quiet, so that if you come to me you will be performing an actual charity."

The note to Lady Grace was couched in much the same terms: "Do spare Winifred, and persuade her to come to

me. My husband and aunt have quarreled, and I am so terribly dull."

"What do you say, my love?" asked Lady Grace; "should you like to go?"

"Oh, so much!" exclaimed the girl, eagerly; "that is, if you and Sir Clayton can spare me."

Perhaps Lady Grace might have been scarcely so willing to part with her favorite, had not the thought crossed her mind that she and Lord Harold were better apart. I should be sorry to attribute only a selfish motive to one so kind and good as Lady Grace, and I know, too, that she remembered what a pleasant change the companionship of a young, light-hearted woman would be for a girl who lived in seclusion, and amongst older people.

She knew, too, somewhat of the heart-burnings that existed between the ill-suited husband and wife, and would have gladly afforded Fee any comfort or alleviation in her power. So it was settled, without either of the gentlemen being consulted, that Winifred was to accept the invitation, and start for the Cedars on the third day following. Both Sir Clayton and Lord Harold were the reverse of pleased when they heard of the arrangement, although they deemed it expedient to conceal their chagrin.

"I suppose aunt wants to get her out of my way," was the reflection that suggested itself to Harold's offended mind, and his first impulse was to announce his own immediate departure. But being good-tempered and kind-hearted in the main, he did not act upon a resolve that would be sure to give his kind aunt pain, and so stopped on for a week after the departure of his lady-love, until he became so intolerably bored, that he was compelled to beat a retreat.

Mrs. Clayton received Winifred with open arms.

"I am so glad you have come!" she exclaimed; "your companionship will make me forget half my troubles. We shall have a *tête-à-tête* dinner to-night. Mr. Clayton is in town."

Winifred had not been five hours in her friend's house before she was aware that Fee had made a miserable marriage; that she had bartered all her possessions for an inadequate value; and that she almost, if not quite, hated the man whose name she bore.

"It is no use," Mrs. Clayton said to her, as they sat to-

gether talking after dinner; "it is fruitless my attempting to keep up appearances, and trying to make you believe I am happy, and do not regret my marriage. I repent of it every day of my life, and every hour in the day. Sometimes I remember your little innocent, romantic speeches about marrying a man for his money. But I should not have been happy with a poor man. We mortals are never contented with the lot that falls to us. If I had married a man on a few hundreds a year, I dare say I should have been discontented, and envious of people who had carriages and fine houses. But surely every one who marries for money is not punished in the horrible manner I am. I assure you, Winifred, that often and often, as I drive out, I envy every person I meet, and think they must be happier than I am."

"O Fee, you are not in earnest?"

"No, that's it; people can not understand!" cried Mrs. Clayton, bitterly; "they see me surrounded by every luxury, apparently without a wish ungratified, and they can form no more idea of my inner life, than—I can of the stone-breaker's on the high-road. Even aunt, who ought to know me better than any one else, has no idea of it."

"How could Lady Marion leave you if she knew you were unhappy?"

"Because Mr. Clayton treated her with such insufferable rudeness, that it caused perpetual quarrels between us, and because aunt could not pass over his behavior to me in silence."

"How *can* he treat you badly, Fee? Does he not love you?"

"I believe he hates me—positively hates me! I do not know whether he ever loved me; I have been inclined to think since that he did not—in fact that he only married me out of revenge. He has said as much, and cursed the day that he ever saw me to my face. O Winifred, it is not my fault; I know I have been foolish and wrong in provoking him, but I did try to care for him and conciliate him at first. But he was so cold, so cruel and spiteful, so mean and unforgiving in little things. I could not—I would not tell any one half the hateful and insulting things he has said and done to me; no one who had not lived with Mr. Clayton would believe them."

During the time that Winifred stayed at the "Cedars," she had plenty of opportunity of judging for herself of the truth of Mrs. Clayton's statement. Before a week had passed, she was convinced of its unimpeachable veracity. Francis Clayton's manner to his wife was in itself an offense, almost every word he addressed to her contained a covert sneer, and he seemed to find no greater pleasure than in thwarting her wishes and contradicting her orders. To make her jealous, he paid Winifred the most extravagant attention, praised everything she did, consulted her on every occasion, and, in short, succeeded in making her thoroughly uncomfortable.

"Never mind, dear," said Mrs. Clayton, quietly, one day; "it does not wound me or make me angry. I am too indifferent to him to feel jealous. Pray keep on good terms with him."

But Winifred detested him, and was systematically cold and repellent in her manner toward him.

He saw it, and laughed secretly to himself.

"Little fool!" he thought, contemptuously, "she assumes these airs of virtuous indignation with huge propriety. Perhaps the simpleton thinks I am in love with her!"

He redoubled his attentions on seeing that they annoyed her. If his wife sat down to the piano, he would get up and leave the room, or else exclaim:

"For Heaven's sake, Marion, don't make that horrid noise; you have not a vestige of voice left. Do get up, and let Miss Eyre sing. *Her* performance is worth listening to. Come, Miss Eyre, *won't* you sing me something?"

"No, I will not!" cried Winifred, angrily, one day, tears of vexation in her eyes. "If you can not admire the beauty of Fee's singing, I take it as no compliment that you should praise me."

"My dear Miss Eyre, pray don't be violent," said Mr. Clayton, with a malicious smile. "I am afraid your temper is getting spoiled by Mrs. Clayton's example; mine has suffered already from her baneful influence."

"I think she must be an angel to have lived with you so long!" Winifred exclaimed, in hot, angry championship of her friend. She was not worldly-wise enough yet to abstain from taking up other people's quarrels.

Mr. Clayton remembered her words, and bore malice toward her for them. At dinner that day he said:

"We met a friend of yours in Paris last winter."

"Did you, Mr. Clayton? Who was it?"

"The man on whom your cousin wanted to fix that pretty little scandal of your rambles in the woods. Let me see, what *was* his name? He seems to have a terrible aptitude for compromising the innocent lambs of the other sex. What *was* that *esclandre* in Paris about the little French girl? Do you recollect, Marion?"

Winifred turned from red to white, and kept her eyes fixed on the plate.

"Yes," said Mrs. Clayton, "I recollect perfectly. You mean Captain Neville; but Winifred does not know him."

"I do *not* mean Captain Neville," snarled Mr. Clayton; "I mean Mr. Hastings."

"Then you have made a mistake," retorted his wife; "I never heard a word against Errol Hastings in my life."

"It's almost a pity you don't get out of your infantine way of calling men by their Christian names!" sneered Mr. Clayton.

"I *am* trying!" answered Fee, with a flash of her old spirit. "You might have noticed that I have not uttered yours once during the last month."

"Do you know, Fee," said Winifred, when they were alone, "I used to think you must be in fault as well as Mr. Clayton. Now I only wonder that you can live with him. I am sure I could not give into him as you do. It would be a struggle for mastery between us every time we met."

"You would give it up in time, as I have done, my dear," Mrs. Clayton answered bitterly. "You get your experience as the caged bird does. When it finds that it gains nothing but bruises and torn feathers by beating its sides against the wires, it ceases its struggles and accepts its fate. It would be harder to bear, you know, Winifred, if I loved him a little, and he were good to me sometimes. I mean to be happy in spite of him. I shall make my own world, and live in it. If he will only leave me to myself, I shall not mind. Ah! my dear, let me be a warning to you. When you meet with a man who loves you, and whom you can love and respect, take him and be true and faithful to him, and do not stop to ask whether he can make you handsome settlements, or give you a grand position."

Be content with the love in a cottage, and the rustic felicity you used to tell me about, and if ever you feel tempted to repine, think of me."

And Mrs. Clayton finished her speech by a half-scornful laugh.

"Ah! dear Fee, don't get bitter and angry. I know you must feel wretched sometimes, but think, dear, how many people you have to love you and care for you."

"Whom have I to love me?" cried Fee, turning sharply round. "Not a soul in the world! Ah, yes, I know *you* love me," she continued, as Winifred was about to interrupt her; "and aunt loves me, and I have plenty of what the world calls friends. But what comfort are they to me? I want some one to love me with all their heart and soul and mind, to whom I should be life, love, happiness, everything, and who would be the same to me."

And the unhappy wife burst into an agony of tears. The girl listener felt powerless before this misery of desolation, this bitterness for which there was no remedy. She could only draw the fair head down to her own tender heart, and cry for sympathy.

Many confidences had passed between the two friends during the last few days, but somehow Mrs. Clayton had studiously avoided all mention of Colonel d'Aguilar. She did not even allude to him when speaking of her visit to Paris. Sometimes she talked of Mr. Hastings, and then, remarking that Winifred was unusually silent, she discontinued the subject. Only once she asked a direct question.

"Winifred, was there ever anything between you and Mr. Hastings?"

The word "No!" was almost on the girl's lips, but she checked herself. She looked up with an expression of pain.

"Yes," she said; "but please do not ask me anything about it."

"I will not say any more if it pains you, dear; but I can scarcely fancy any woman being indifferent to Errol Hastings' love. I am certain that he cares for you. Once in Paris I showed him your miniature, and he stood for a long time looking at it, with an expression of such intense regret, and when he laid it down he sighed deeply. How I should like to see you married to him!"

"I would not marry him if he asked me on his knees!"

cried Winifred, passionately; and then added, with a half scornful laugh: "But he is scarcely Lord Burleigh-like enough to confer such an honor on a country maiden."

Mrs. Clayton said no more on the subject, but feminine curiosity was strong enough in her to make her form a variety of guesses as to the cause of her friend's bitterness against the master of Hazell Court. "Perhaps she has her troubles too," reflected Fee. "Although it is hard to imagine that any real sorrow can come to a girl who is unmarried, and has people about her who love her!"

The wife was thinking with a heavy heart of the last trouble which had fallen upon her, no longer ago than that very morning.

She had gone into the small library to look for a book. The window was open, and she saw her husband at the further end of the lawn, talking to one of the gardeners. It was evident he had just run out, for he still wore his slippers, and was without a hat. Mrs. Clayton had to pass the *escritoire* at which he had been writing. On the Russia-leather portfolio lay a pink, scented missive, which she took up without hesitation. The note contained the affectionate thanks of a lady, signing herself Ada Hamilton, to her dear bear for the lovely ear-rings just received, and other matters irrelevant to this story. Mr. Clayton had evidently been in the act of answering this billet, for a sheet of paper lay beside it, on which he had commenced—"Dearest Ada, I hope to be—" and there it ended.

For a moment Fee had a wild thought of confronting her husband and insisting on an explanation. A woman may dislike her husband ever so much, but if she be a true woman, the evidence that he gives to another that love and attention which he denies her must be terribly galling to her. Hot tears of wounded pride sprung to Mrs. Clayton's aching eyes. Suddenly a quick thought flashed into her mind.

"Perhaps he meant me to see it—perhaps he wants to be separated from me, and to rid himself of the ties he hates. But it would be folly for me to proclaim my wrongs; I should get no redress—I should lose nine-tenths of the luxuries I now command; and what would my position be as the separated, not divorced, wife of a bad man?"

Poor Fee turned away from the room without the book

she had come to seek. In moving away from the writing-table, a thread of the silk fringe of her sleeve caught in the drawer and remained there. A few minutes afterward, when Mr. Clayton returned to complete his note, his quick eye perceived it hanging.

"So, then," he muttered, with an unpleasant smile, "my lady has been spying!—so much the better. I wonder what she will do?—ask her innocent little friend's advice, perhaps."

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD DREAM REALIZED.

AFTER a ten days' visit to Mrs. Clayton, Winifred was summoned home.

"I would gladly let you remain longer," wrote Lady Grace, "but you remember, my dear, that our original plan was to leave for London on the twenty-eighth, and Sir Clayton never likes his plans interfered with. He misses you greatly, and Madame de Montolieu is anxious to have you for a day or two before we go."

Mme. de Montolieu had decided on not accompanying them to town.

"I am not used to gayety or noise of any sort," she said, when Lady Grace expressed a wish to take her with them, "and I feel as though a week of London life would kill me. No, dear madame, you must add to all your former goodness to me by allowing me to stay here, and lead my quiet existence without interruption. I shall take care of the house in your absence, and see that none of your poor lack the bounteous hand you so often extend toward them. If I feel very solitary and sad without you, I know you will let me join you; but I have not much fear of that. You know, dear lady, for how many years my life has been one of solitude. If it seemed hard at first, I have many a time blessed it since."

"It shall be as you wish, dear madame," Lady Grace replied. "I have not forgotten that your coming to us was conditional on your perfect freedom of action."

On the twenty-fifth of April Winifred returned to Endon Vale, very sorry to leave her friend, but with almost a sense of relief at being freed from the obnoxious society of

Mr. Clayton. Every one welcomed her with open arms; the house had not seemed the same without her—it lacked the sunshine, as the old French lady said.

“I shall miss you terribly, my child,” she told Winifred, when they were alone; “but then, I shall comfort myself with the reflection that what I have so long desired for you has come to pass. I do not think the world will spoil you; but you will be always in my prayers and thoughts.”

On the day appointed, Sir Clayton and Lady Grace Farquhar, and Miss Eyre, arrived at Eaton Square, and were duly announced in the fashionable chronicles. A new life suddenly opened on the girl who had spent all her young years in such quiet, not to say monotony. She found it very pleasant, although not altogether what it had been in her dreams two years before. The first few days were occupied in shopping, seeing dress-makers and milliners, and driving in the park. Certainly there was a satisfaction in leaning back in the handsome carriage, and being whirled past the admiring eyes of the throng outside the rails, and remembering how she had once stood there, without the faintest hope or chance of ever taking part in the scene before her. People who have been accustomed to live in great houses and ride in grand carriages all their lives, can not by any possibility derive that pleasure and satisfaction from doing so that others experience to whom luxury comes fresh and as a novelty. Although Winifred had adapted herself admirably, and without the least awkwardness, to her new position, and was by this time perfectly accustomed to it, yet the pleasure and the novelty remained; and the idea of mixing in society, which she had once dreamed of afar off, was, now that she had in a great measure recovered from her father's death, very pleasant to her. Her *début* was to take place at the house of Miss Douglas, Lord Harold Erskine's aunt, a lady occupying a very decided position in the fashionable world, and the *entrée* to whose entertainments was very generally desired. Lady Grace was anxious that her *protégée* should look her best.

“I leave your dress to your own taste, my dear,” she said; “but I wish no expense spared. Remember, a great deal of success depends on first impressions.”

When Winifred appeared, dressed, on the night of the

ball, Lady Grace had no reason to regret having allowed her to exercise her own taste. The dress was of a marvelous whiteness and softness, almost like snow clouds, and here and there over it were the softest white feathers, that might have been flakes of fallen snow.

"A triumph of your taste and your dress-maker's skill, eh, my dear?" said Sir Clayton, who came in to look at her before she went.

Winifred was trembling with excitement and nervousness. I fear I must confess for her a great anxiety as to whether many people would ask her to dance, and if they would think well of her. Would Mr. Hastings be there?—if so, what a triumph it would be for her to look well. She hoped, she believed she danced well; Lord Harold was a splendid dancer, and he had praised her. Then perhaps that was because she was his pupil, and he had spared no pains in teaching her. She was engaged to dance first with him—she felt glad of that; she was perfectly at home with him always, and it would give her time to collect herself. It was with great trepidation that she followed Lady Grace into the room where the hostess received her guests. A haughty, dignified-looking woman was Miss Douglas; but her manner was marked by extreme courtesy, and she bestowed on Lady Grace and her *protégée* even more than usual attention. Her nephew, standing behind her, was enraptured at Winifred's appearance, and ejaculated several mental "By Joves!"

He gave her his arm immediately, and led her into the dancing-room. When she had waltzed twice round the room with him, she was radiant, excited with pleasure, and every vestige of nervousness gone. She began to notice then how many eyes were directed toward her. Perhaps the pleasantest incense she received on that night of triumphant enjoyment was the jealous, mortified glance her cousin, Miss Champion, bestowed on her in passing. When Lord Harold took her back to Lady Grace, he was plied by almost every man in the room for an introduction to the *débutante*. He exercised his own discretion in the matter, and only made her known to the most eligible *partis* and the best dancers. It was Winifred's first ball, and she had not yet learned the deceptive art of manufacturing and filling up false programmes, so she engaged herself to dance with every one who asked her, as long as there

was any blank space left on her card. Very late in the evening Mr. Hastings appeared. As he entered the ball-room, he caught sight of Winifred, talking in a very animated manner to Lord Harold in an interval of waltzing. He stood and watched her intently; until to-night he had never thought her beautiful. He had loved her for her grace, for her pride, for her innocence; he had admired her changeful expression and large wistful eyes more than beauty; but as she looked and smiled now, she felt she had a greater claim to general admiration than he had ever dreamed of.

"And she might have been my wife now," he thought. "How I should have loved her—how proud I should have been of her! I wonder if she really cares for that fellow Erskine?"

At this moment a voice said close to his ear, as though the speaker had defined his thoughts:

"Will it be a match, do you think?"

He turned with an angry start, and met the mocking gaze of Flora Champion.

"You mean Grey and Miss Wentworth? I think it very probable," Mr. Hastings answered, curtly.

"Oh, no, *that* is beyond a doubt. I meant Lord Harold Erskine and—his partner."

"I can not form the slightest surmise. Your cousin"—and he spoke the word pointedly—"your cousin is very beautiful, and may even do better."

"Perhaps be chosen by the descendant of all the Hastings?" she asked, with a scornful laugh.

"Your penetration seems unusually at fault to-night, Miss Champion," he returned, coldly; "but pardon me, the dance is over. I am going to seek a partner for the next; your card is full, I see;" and he moved off, before Flora had time to intimate her willingness to exchange his name on her programme with that of a less eligible aspirant. She bit her lip angrily as she saw him cross straight over to where her cousin stood, and bend to speak with her. She could not but remark the tender deference of his bearing toward the country girl whom she despised, and whom she well remembered ignoring to him as only a farmer's daughter. She wondered whether he remembered it; whether he thought less of her for it; and then, angry with herself, and vexed by her reflections, she turned to

the quiet, middle-aged man on whose arm she leaned, and began to talk to him with some of her old brightness and vivacity. He listened with admiring attention, but had very little to say in reply. Flora felt inexpressibly bored.

"This man is a dolt—a fool!" she said to herself, angrily; "the idea even of all his money scarcely reconciles me to the horrible tedium of spending so much time in his company."

Mr. Maxwell was an excessively uninteresting, rich bachelor of two-and-forty. He gave one an impression of weakness and yielding that made it a matter of surprise he had been allowed to remain so long in the unblessed estate of bachelorhood; but the very indecision and want of resolution in his character had saved him hitherto from every snare or device of the other sex. He was indolent, nervous, feebly good-tempered, and a great gourmand. Having long ago abandoned in disgust the business in which his father and grandfather had amassed their wealth, he had subsided into a haunter of clubs, a guest and entertainer of *bon vivants*, and gradually crept into good society by the aid of his only sister, who had married into a good but poor family, and professed to despise the plebeian wealth of the Maxwells, but had no scruple in making use of it. Soirées, concerts, and balls afforded him the very smallest degree of amusement, but he was under the impression that an hour spent at a fashionable *réunion* inestimably improved his position in society, and, therefore, made the sacrifice regularly and constantly, with only the most feeble of protests. He had entertained a vague idea of marrying a good many women, but one thought had always deterred him, suppose his wife should object, or try to put a stop to his frequent and delightful club dinners (he did not believe in private cooks), or require to be escorted to entertainments at an hour which would be the positive ruin of his digestion! Digestion gone, what pleasure was there left him in life? None, positively none! He had but one enjoyment—one real, actual enjoyment. What cared he for music, or dancing, or riding, or romance, or French novels, or making love, or other things that are the enjoyments or the dream of the young? No, he could exist well enough without that which makes life, romance, and luxury for hot, impatient youth. But what would existence have in compensation for him, when he

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could no longer enjoy venison, truffles, turtle, *sauces*, *piquantes*, dry champagne, Château Yquem, '20 Port, and comet clarets. Alas! gourmandism is the fault of childhood and the weakness of age. There are many exceptions, of course, but my friends, are we not told that the exception proves the rule. But—*Revenons!*

Mr. Maxwell had met Flora Champion several times, and had admired her, much as he had admired half a score of fine girls before. One day, as Flora was dressing for dinner, a thought struck her mind which made her smile, not quite pleasantly, either.

"He is rich," she said to herself; "he is as weak as water, and he is greedy—three admirable qualities for a husband who you do not want to care about! Why should I not marry him? I am not bred of that stuff which makes puling school-girls die of love, or I might have worn a willow long enough ago. I am sick of living at home. I dare say if I married a man I liked ever so much, I should be disappointed in him, and there is no harder trial than seeing your ideal destroy itself. Besides, I like admiration; I always shall. A good-looking, young husband might object to one's receiving attention from other men; but a senile old gourmand like this Mr. Maxwell would care for nothing, if you gave him good dinners, and let him dine at his club as often as he pleased. Grandpapa says I have no tact and no power of pleasing left. We will see to-night."

On that evening Mr. Maxwell was to be entertained by Sir Howard at a small but very select dinner-party; the baronet was somewhat of a *bon vivant* himself. Flora made it an especial request, at the last moment, that she should be taken in to dinner by Mr. Maxwell.

"What the devil have you got into your head now?" asked her grandfather, with a considerable elevation of his shaggy eyebrows. "Do you think of marrying him?"

"Perhaps!" uttered Flora, coldly.

"Well, my dear!" returned Sir Howard, after a short pause. "I often thought your husband would be mythological; but I certainly never looked for a Silenus." And he smiled grimly at his own humor.

Flora sat next to Mr. Maxwell at dinner. She did not talk much to him; that might disturb his digestion and affect his temper. But when she did speak, it was always

of eating. She advised him from the bill of fare of every dish that was to appear, and saw that he was liberally supplied with every dainty, and that his glass was never empty. She promised to secure from Sir Howard's *chef* a receipt that was only known to him and two other men in London. She talked eloquently of the advantages of clubs, and folly of feminine objections to them. She declared it was only sick and silly people who despised eating, and that when men and women arrived at years of discretion, none who possessed common sense and discrimination undervalued the importance that a good appetite and digestion had relative to health. Mr. Maxwell was enchanted. It had never before been his good fortune to meet with a young woman so gifted with good sense and discernment. Most girls affected a profound disregard for those pleasures of the table that were so essential, so delightful to him. It would be charming to have a wife who was not only beautiful and well-born, but could be a sympathetic companion, and the *confidante* of his joys. He actually found himself wondering whether she would accept him if he proposed to her.

And Flora, as she leaned back in her chair at dessert, fearful of disturbing her companion's digestion, had still the grace to be ashamed of the part she had played during the last two hours. But all the same, she did not shrink or draw back from the course she had decided upon; and the following evening, when she met her new admirer at Miss Douglas's ball, she resumed the attack, and, to all appearance, with a very fair chance of success. But while she was in the very midst of exercising her fascinations on the dull, middle-aged man, she had passed Errol Hastings, standing absorbed in the contemplation of her cousin. An angry, jealous pang shot through her heart. Here was a man, young, rich, handsome, whom she once thought she would marry. What had prevented it? Was it yet too late? When she had exchanged the few sentences with him that we have recorded, she knew it was, and went back somewhat *désillusionnée* to the pursuit of Mr. Maxwell.

Meanwhile Mr. Hastings had crossed over to where Winifred was standing, engaged in laughing conversation with Lord Harold, a bright smile on her lips, and apparently very happy. She did not see Errol until he came up to her; and then she stopped short in a sentence and changed color. She felt a quick thrill of pleasure when she saw his

handsome face bent on her with a genuine admiration. Some sudden thought of forgetting her pride and yielding to her love came surging into her brain; and then her second, new, unnatural self rebelled, and she greeted him with a cold, indifferent smile.

"You will dance with me, Winifred?" he whispered, as Lord Harold turned to speak to some one behind him.

"I am engaged for every dance, thank you."

"May I come and call in Eaton Square?"

"I dare say Lady Grace will be pleased to see you."

"But you?"

"It is my duty to be pleased to see any and all of Lady Farquhar's guests."

"You are not natural, Miss Eyre—you are strangely altered from the generous, large-hearted, true Winifred I knew two years ago."

"Is it well for ignorant country girls to be trustful?" she asked, with a quick scorn. "If they are generous, do they always meet with like generosity from those whose minds are more enlarged, or should be from their birth and station?"

"Is your enmity to be life-long, then?"

"No doubt it will wear out in time, as every other feeling does," was the quick response.

As Mr. Hastings walked away, he asked himself how it was possible that a man whose inherent fault was intense pride, could voluntarily expose himself to the slights and indifference of a young girl?

"I wonder how it is that I still care for her? She seems to have lost all that made me love her when I first knew her. What a fool I am! I *will* not think any more of her!"

And he left the room and the house, and went off to an entertainment where a considerably greater degree of freedom reigned than at the mansion of stately Miss Douglas, and where he was sure of an enthusiastic welcome.

With the charming inconsistency of the sex, Winifred was terribly chagrined on discovering that he was really gone.

"He is disgusted with me—he will not bear my unworthy treatment of him longer," she thought, bitterly.

"I love him with all my heart, and I have lost him!"

The evening lost half its brightness from that time, al-

though she received attention and homage enough to have turned her head. Kind Lady Grace was delighted at her favorite's success. She felt almost (not quite—that would have been impossible) what a mother does who lives her youth over again in her daughter's success.

"I need not ask you, dear, if you have enjoyed your evening; you would be something more or less than mortal not to be satisfied with such a success."

"Ah! dear Lady Grace, how shall I ever repay all your goodness to me? Sometimes, long ago, I used to dream of some such pleasure as to-night, but never with the idea of having it realized."

Lord Harold was staying at his aunt's for a few days; so the morning after the ball they sat down to discuss it.

"I predict, aunt, it will be remembered as one of the best balls of the season. I never enjoyed one more in my life."

"The best balls, Harold, are always those we enjoy most. But I do not imagine that all the pains I have taken with the appointments, or the expense to which they put me, had any share in making it a good ball for you. I think there was some other attraction. I remarked that you devoted yourself very much to that graceful girl who came with Lady Grace Farquhar. I forget her name."

"Miss Eyre, aunt."

"Eyre! Eyre!" repeated Miss Douglass. "What family does she belong to?"

"Not any that you would be acquainted with, aunt," Lord Harold replied, quickly. "Her father was a gentleman farmer, but her mother was a Miss Champion."

"Not the one who made such a terrible *mésalliance*, surely, Harold?"

"The same."

"Then how comes she to be with your aunt Grace?"

"She has adopted her."

"Why?"

"Because her father died, and she was left alone in the world."

"What folly! I hope, Harold, you have no serious thoughts about the girl?"

"It would be no use if I had, aunt."

"No use! What do you mean? Is she engaged?"

"Heaven forbid! At least, not that I know of."

"Do speak out, Harold. Why no use?"

"Because I have asked her twice to marry me, and she has refused."

"Refused you, Harold!" cried Miss Douglas, with amazed consternation. "Refused you!"

"Yes, dear aunt," he replied—"twice."

"What could be her object?"

"She did not care for me, I suppose."

"Pshaw!" said the old lady, angrily; "a farmer's daughter not care for a man with a title and a fortune, when he is young and good-looking besides! There must have been some other reason."

"None that I know of."

"Harold, I have not common patience with you. But you may thank the girl's folly for saving you a fortune. I would not have left you a shilling if you had married her."

"Aunt," said Lord Harold, looking up quickly, with a red flush on his face, "I have always been fond of you, for your kindness to me, and I don't think you are likely to suspect me of being a fortune-hunter; but I tell you candidly, I would give up all hope of your money, and half my own, if I could prevail on Winifred Eyre to be my wife."

CHAPTER V.

DANGEROUS!

WINIFRED was standing at the window of a Piccadilly mansion, waiting for her friend, Mrs. Clayton. A single brougham, with one splendid horse, was at the door, ready to convey them into the Park. Presently Mr. Clayton entered.

"What! Miss Eyre, you here?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Mr. Clayton."

"I thought you always rode in the mornings?"

"Fee asked me to walk in the Park with her to-day. She did not care to ride."

"She is very capricious, I think. She always tells me she can not walk five hundred yards."

"We are going to drive there."

"What in?"

"Her brougham."

Mr. Clayton hurried to the window.

"Why, damn it all!" he muttered, "she has taken Lancer," and he left the room. A moment afterward Winifred saw him on the pavement, speaking angrily to the coachman. The man touched his hat and drove off. At this moment Fee came in, looking like a little fairy in her diaphanous drapery.

"I have kept you waiting, have I not, dear? Let us go at once; the brougham is here."

"It has just gone, Fee."

"Gone! Where?"

"I do not know. I think Mr. Clayton has sent it away."

"What makes you think that?" exclaimed Fee, flushing with anger.

"He came in here just now and looked out of the window. He seemed very angry when he saw the brougham, and went out immediately."

Mrs. Clayton rang the bell sharply.

"Is the brougham at the door?" she asked the footman.

"Master has just sent it away, ma'am. He said I was to tell you he had ordered the bay horse to drive himself this afternoon. Harris has gone back to the stables to fetch the chestnut."

Fee was bitterly angry and mortified, but she controlled herself admirably.

"We will walk there, then, Winifred, if you do not mind," she said quietly. "You can send Harris after us when he returns," she added to the servant.

It was some minutes before she spoke again; something seemed to rise in her throat and choke her. To be humiliated in this way before her servants, to have her slightest order countermanded, was torture to her proud nature. Presently she said:

"We hear sometimes of women leaving their husbands, and then the world cries them down, and they never dare show their faces in society again. If people could know one half a wife may suffer, I wonder if they would be so harsh?"

"I wish I could say something to comfort you, Fee; your life must be horrible!"

"And yet you do not know half. These little annoyances and provocations which make you sympathize with

me are but the least part of what I have to bear. O Winifred, I am so miserable! I envy every one I meet, and think they must be less unhappy than I am; even that blind man with the dog, or that poor creature who drags himself on one hand and knee along this pavement, day after day."

And then they walked on silently down the broad street, past the magnificent mansions looking on to the St. James's Park, amid the crowd of business and pleasure-seekers. Dusty passengers looked down on them with an admiring stare from the top of hot, crowded omnibuses; pale, envious faces peeped out from cabs after them; the ubiquitous street-boy delayed his errand to contemplate them, and the beggars and cripples, and poor deformed creatures, who haunt the steps of luxury and fashion, gazed wistfully at them with that look of suffering which they always wear either from habit or pain—who knows? The two ladies had pitiful, gentle hearts, God bless them! and believed, when they bestowed money on some poor ragged creature, that they were relieving want, not encouraging vice and idleness. Some one remonstrated once with Miss Eyre for giving charity in the street. She was told that, in all probability, the poor wretch to whom she offered alms was worthless and undeserving.

"Perhaps you are right," said Winifred; "but when I see one of these poor objects, I only feel that they are poor, and hungry, and miserable, and half clothed, while I am living in luxury, and I feel as if it is wicked to turn away from them without the little help I can give."

Presently Mrs. Clayton and Miss Eyre turned into the Park gates, and crossed over to the thronged promenade. They were so late there seemed no hope of getting chairs, unless they met with some strong-armed, gallantly disposed man amongst their acquaintance who did not object to carrying them from a distance.

"Look, Fee," cried Winifred, suddenly, "there is your husband. Perhaps he will bring you a chair."

Mr. Clayton would have passed them, but Winifred stopped him.

"Will you get Fee a chair?—she is so tired."

"There is not a chair to be had. If she is tired, she had better go home again," and he passed on.

Winifred was terribly vexed. She knew her friend was

not strong, and was afraid of her being fatigued by standing about.

"I am afraid it is hopeless," she said; but at that very moment she caught sight of Mr. Hastings approaching them. He would have passed with a bow, but she stopped him, blushing vividly. "Mr. Hastings, *do* you think you can get Mrs. Clayton a chair?—she is so tired."

"I have no doubt I can," he replied, with a smile, departing on his quest.

In three minutes he returned.

"I have found two chairs and have left some one in charge of them. Come this way."

Winifred wanted to thank him, but he gave her no opportunity. He stood for ten minutes talking to Mrs. Clayton, and then he bowed distantly to Miss Eyre, and went to speak to a group of ladies further on.

"Look, Winifred," said her companion, "there is your cousin. Do you see how she is flirting with that insane old Maxwell? I believe she means to marry him."

"How can you be so absurd, Fee?"

"Why absurd?"

"He is old enough to be her father, and she can not like him."

"He is rich, dear—very rich; and, you know," added Mrs. Clayton bitterly, "worse men than Mr. Maxwell have been married for money."

"How do you do, Miss Eyre?" said a well-known voice by her side at this moment, and both ladies gave a little start at the interruption.

When Colonel d'Aguilar stopped to speak to Winifred, he had not the most remote idea that her companion was Mrs. Clayton, or he would certainly have passed by with a simple recognition. He had not been schooling himself to forget and avoid her for the last three months to have all his heart-burnings and struggles with conscience roused by a voluntary meeting with her. It was a dangerous time, too, for a talk between them, just when Fee was quivering with anger and bitterness from her husband's insults and neglect. She would not let him stay talking to her friend, but beckoned him over to her side. Each one of the three felt vaguely uncomfortable. Winifred remembered with a sort of uneasiness the old times at Endon Vale. She did not know that Colonel d'Aguilar and Mrs. Clayton had

met since. Colonel d'Aguilar was angry with himself for allowing his resolution to be shaken, and Fee was defying, although dreading her husband.

They had been talking together some time in a low voice, when Francis Clayton passed down the Row behind them. He started with anger as he recognized the two heads bent together, and a scowl contracted his sullen brows. He did not stop then, but walked past them. Perhaps a more pleasing thought occurred to him, for when he turned he was smiling.

"So you found seats at last, Miss Eyre!" he said, coming close to Winifred's chair; and the start which she and her companions gave at the sound of his voice by no means escaped him. "Oh, D'Aguilar, is that you?" he added, as the latter looked up. "I am more fortunate in meeting you here than I was in Paris. Let me see, I think you arrived the day I left, and left the very day I returned. Singular coincidence, was it not, Miss Eyre?"

But in spite of such an unpromising commencement, Mr. Clayton did not seem at all inclined to make himself rude or disagreeable to his wife's friends; on the contrary, he seemed disposed to be sociable, and even invited him home to lunch.

Colonel d'Aguilar was not by nature mistrustful, but he found it very hard to put faith in the amenities of Francis Clayton, although he failed in discovering a treacherous meaning in them.

He declined the invitation, however, pleading another engagement. Fee had been utterly astonished at first by the change in her husband's manner, but she soon fathomed it. It might have put her on her guard had she been less miserable or less indifferent; now she only felt a sort of vague, heart-sick pleasure. No disgrace, no wretchedness, but seemed easy to bear in comparison with her present life. When the time came to go, the two men, one of whom loved and the other detested her, handed her into her brougham with equal care and attention, and raised their hats as she drove away.

When the carriage had driven off, and they turned to say good-bye, a strange look passed between the two men. A smile on the lips and a curse in the heart are apt to give a curious expression, though.

Winifred had been three times to the opera. In the old

days in the country, when the Italian opera had formed part of her fairy-land in day-dreams, she had scarcely imagined anything that was not realized now. Perhaps she had been singularly fortunate in hearing the most charming if not the grandest operas first—"Norma," "Il Barbiere," and "Il Trovatore." To-night she was to hear "Lucrezia Borgia." She was hardly indifferent enough yet for a fashionable young lady. It vexed and troubled her when visitors came into the box and would talk during those thrilling songs.

Winifred was leaning back, her eyes half-closed, listening to a celebrated singer's liquid voice in "Com 'e Bel-lo." She did not hear the soft opening of the door, or remark that Lady Grace was talking to some one. Mr. Hastings had come in, and was watching her intently.

If you want to forget a person, it is a singular mistake to trust yourself in his or her presence when the senses are intrahled by beautiful and voluptuous music. Not until the act was over did she see him; then she greeted him as she had not done since the old days. Her manner was frank, and she was as simple and natural as in the time when he first knew her. He came and sat behind her, whispering now and then in a low voice, and for once she gave herself up to the charm of his presence. She was happy—almost intoxicated with the happiness of being near him, and letting herself love him. The music stole over her senses, and softened out every thought of bitterness—every feeling but love. If he had spoken to her then as he did on the night of the ball—as he did in the after-days, she would not have answered him with coldness and scorn. But he did not know how she felt toward him, and the golden opportunity vanished.

Perhaps the same feeling had stolen over his senses when he first heard beautiful, spirit-stirring music; but it was so far away in the past he had forgotten. When she turned to speak to him in a low voice and her eyes looked for a moment into his, he thought: "She is becoming a woman of the world; her eyes are learning to express what she does not feel." He was wrong; but then how is it possible for men to understand every variation of feeling in the hearts of the women they love?

Women are instinctively quick in reading women. Lady Grace was watching Winifred's demeanor to Mr. Hastings

intently although unobtrusively, and she recognized the master passion in the look the girl now and again turned upon him. And she wondered—wondered what cause could bring a forced estrangement between two people who loved each other as she felt they did. She sighed.

“Ah!” she thought, “the young will not learn by the experience of others. They must spoil their whole lives by a caprice, or a fancied injury, before they can see the misery of forcing a resentment, and steeling themselves against forgetting and forgiving.”

The curtain had fallen on the last act. Mr. Hastings was wrapping Winifred in her cloak.

“You will be at Mrs. Clayton’s ball on Thursday, of course?” he whispered.

“Oh, yes, I hope so.”

“Will you dance with me?”

“Yes, if you ask me.”

“Will you keep the first waltz that you are there for for me?”

She whispered, “Yes!” very softly. Her tone made him think that perhaps, after all, she was not indifferent to him. But he could not say more then, for he was obliged to give his arm to Lady Grace.

Since her arrival in London Winifred had often thought herself of the aunt and cousins who lived in a new district away beyond Brompton.

“Lady Grace,” she said, the morning after the opera, “would you mind my going some day to see my aunt?”

“Mind, my love! certainly not. I have thought, two or three times, it would be right for you to do so, but waited until you should suggest it. Go this afternoon, if you feel inclined.”

“But you will not like driving alone?”

“I do not intend to drive to-day. I must reserve myself for our dinner-party this evening. You can take the carriage. Perhaps your aunt would like a drive in the Park.”

“Oh, Lady Grace,” cried Winifred, “you are too good; but I do not think I ought to take advantage of your kindness.”

“Why not, my dear? It is one of my gratifications to give pleasure when I can—and so I think it is yours too. I will order the carriage half an hour earlier. And, my

dear, give my compliments to your aunt, and say I shall be pleased if she will lunch with us one day next week."

Winifred kissed and thanked Lady Grace affectionately, and went to don her habit for a ride with Sir Clayton.

That afternoon the inhabitants of Poplar Terrace were much surprised and excited by seeing a very grand carriage, with a powdered footman, stop at No. 15. Mrs. Raymond was equally astonished, and perhaps a little dismayed, until she recognized her niece.

Winifred ran in, "just the same as ever," her aunt said, a little wonderingly, afterward.

"Well, auntie, dear, I have come to see you at last. And Lady Grace has sent the carriage for you to have a drive in the Park, so make haste and put on your bonnet. Where are Dora and Annie?"

"Dora has gone to her dancing-lesson, but Annie is at home. But, my dear, you don't mean Lady Grace Farquhar said anything about my going in her carriage? I shouldn't like to do such a thing."

"Nonsense, auntie; Lady Grace would not have said it if she had not meant it. You do not know how good and considerate she is."

"But I have nothing fit to wear in such a carriage as that."

"Oh, yes you have, I know. Now, do be quick, because I should not like to keep the horses waiting too long, and let Annie come too."

Thereupon Mrs. Raymond hurried off, and after great search for various articles of dress, generally kept in lavender, and only looked at, brought out some very grand attire, while the house-maid performed the same office for Annie, a not very interesting child of twelve. Whilst she was left alone, Winifred thought about all that had happened since she last sat in that small pasteboard double drawing-room, furnished throughout with green reps, gilt-framed looking-glasses, and walnut chiffoniers of the sort that one has come to connect mentally with the Tottenham Court Road. She was profoundly thankful for the good fortune that had come to her, although she could not forget that her present happiness and comfort sprung from a deep sorrow. But it was pleasant to be rich, and live with refined cultivated people, and she thought she could not have felt very happy in this common little place, with

relations with whom she could not have felt much sympathy. But she was delighted to be the means of giving them this pleasure. She remembered all the delight and triumph it would have caused her in former days to ride in so grand a carriage, and she did not mind the least in the world that the appearance of her relations was not very imposing or fashionable. Mrs. Raymond came in presently with Annie, radiant, delighted, and nervous. It was not without some trepidation that she mounted the steps of the barouche, assisted by the grand footman. She would not have leaned back for the world; but there was a conscious pride in her manner, and perhaps not the least part of her enjoyment was the idea that she was an object of scrutiny and envy to her neighbors.

"My dear, this is very kind of you, and how beautiful you do look!" she said, with a squeeze of Winifred's hand. "Why, I never thought you pretty before, and how lovely all your things are! I think you have been in luck's way to find such grand friends. You know Raymond and I meant to have asked you to come and live with us when the accident happened to poor, dear George; but when we heard of Sir Clayton Farquhar and his lady offering to take you, we thought we had better keep in the background, for fear of standing in your way. And the idea of old Sir Howard coming forward in that handsome way ready to adopt you, and putting up that lovely monument, I never was so thunder-struck in my life! Do you ever see him now?"

"Not very often, aunt. I can not forget how he behaved to poor, dear papa."

"There now, my dear, I think you're wrong. Always let by-gones be by-gones, and I am sure he made the *amende* in every way. Dear me! what a number of people!"

Mrs. Raymond's delight was great at seeing her niece bow to several persons in very grand carriages; but nothing excited her so much as Winifred's acquaintance with a gentleman driving a splendidly appointed four-in-hand.

"My dear, who is that very handsome young man with those splendid horses? What an elegant manner he has, and how he bowed to you—just as if you were a countess! What is his name, and how did you come to know him?"

"He is Mr. Hastings, aunt. He lives down in Hirstshire, about a mile from the old Farm."

"Is he married, my dear?"

"No, aunt."

"Well, Winifred, I expect you will be making some grand match one of these days. It would be a fine thing for you to marry some one like Mr. Hastings."

"It would, indeed, aunt; but I do not think I mean to marry at all."

"Ah, my dear, so all the young ladies say before they are asked. You'll change your mind, I dare say."

"Perhaps you are right, aunt, but I have forgotten my message—Lady Grace would like you to come and lunch next week."

"Oh, my dear, I am much obliged to her ladyship, but I think I would rather not. You know I am not used to grand people."

"She is just the same as any one else, auntie, only kinder and more considerate."

"I'll just ask Raymond about it, my dear; and you make some excuse to her ladyship about my not being able to send an answer to-day."

When Mrs. Raymond asked her husband whether she should go, he said:

"No, my dear, certainly not. It shows a very nice feeling in Winifred not being ashamed of us; but we are plain people, and should not do her any credit, so I think you had best keep away."

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. LYNEDON'S GARDEN-PARTY.

THE weeks rolled on, and the London season was at its height. Drawing-rooms, concerts, balls, operas, *fêtes champêtres*, flower-shows, and garden-parties went on as usual to make up the sum of the gay world's pleasures and disappointments. Mrs. Clayton—one of many, perhaps—had been leading a life of fitful, feverish happiness for the last month. She did not dare to think—a pause of retrospection would either send her headlong down the precipice that was yawning at her feet, or make her fly from it altogether. She had not strength to do either. There was a snare set before her, and she saw it plainly, and knew the hand that laid it there, and yet she defied it and played with it

—did everything in short but try to escape from it. She saw through the baseness of the man she had sworn to honor, fully; she knew that he was willing to purchase freedom from the tie that bound them together by his own dishonor. And yet she was so unpardonably weak that she hesitated, and could not bring herself to break off all intercourse with Colonel d'Aguilar. There was no one to help her. Could the man who loved her, and who saw her cruelly insulted and miserable, persuade her to banish and forget him? Do men, strong and honorable though they be, *ever* make such sacrifices? If they did, women perchance would not love them so well. That kind of selfishness spoils many a life, but it is the creative essence of passion. When Fee met Colonel d'Aguilar in Paris she had been studiously silent on the subject of her unhappy marriage. It was not so now. She concealed nothing from him—the misery of her life, the open insults and slights she was forced to bear from Francis Clayton, his offensive and often violent conduct to her. The sympathy of one man for the wrongs inflicted upon her by another is a luxury that a woman wants all her resolution to forego. It was almost a happiness to Fee to see the red flush of anger and hear the quick-drawn breath when she told him of her sufferings. There was no restraint between them now, and yet neither had said to the other in words, “I love you.” As if to draw the last plank of safety away from his wife, Mr. Clayton treated her daily worse. He left letters in her way that could not fail to mortify her. If they went out together he made a point of keeping her waiting. He never opened his lips to speak to her unless he was positively obliged, and then his words were sneers and taunts. He paid other women the most extravagant compliments and attention. In short, but for Colonel d'Aguilar's presence and sympathy, Fee's life would have been unendurable. They met constantly. To show the self-control that Francis Clayton could exercise over himself if he pleased, he always treated Colonel d'Aguilar with marked politeness, and invited him constantly to his house.

“We shall always be glad to see you in our box at the opera,” he said. He knew well enough what a dangerous place that was for confidence. And yet the two people, for and against whom he was plotting, knowing his motive and fully alive to his treachery, were either too weak or

too much in love to stand up against him and defeat his plans. And so matters went on; and Fee, doubting, fearing, terrified, and yet exultant, had not a single friend to advise her or help her in her need. Lady Marion Alton had been sent for by her mother, who was dangerously ill in Ireland, and Mrs. Clayton felt she could not confide in Winifred on such a subject much as she loved her. Once she had thought of saying something to Lady Grace Farquhar, but she shrunk from it. She knew she could not bear to take the counsel that would be given her.

One of the entertainments that was intended to rank among the first of the season, was a garden-party given by the Hon. Mrs. Vivian Lynedon at her beautiful villa on the banks of the river. No expense was to be spared; amusement of every imaginable kind was to be provided; and the whole was to end in a display of such costly fireworks as were rarely seen, and a dance. Mr. and Mrs. Clayton were invited. At the last moment he declined to go, and his wife went without him. He did not attempt to prevent her. Colonel d'Aguilar was to be there. "I will not spoil sport," he said, to himself, with a smile that would have become Mephistopheles. Fee could not have said conscientiously that she had no warning. A voice seemed to say constantly in her ear, "Do not go alone. You are foolish, you are wrong—harm will come of it. You know the world will talk; you are playing into your husband's hands." She silenced the condemnation of her own mind with feverish impatience. "I will not do anything hasty. Surely I am mistress of my own actions; and I am so miserable—how can I afford to give up my only happiness?" So she went alone, pale and agitated, but beautifully dressed, and looking very fair and lovely. "How can any man neglect such a creature as that?" every one said. "Some one else is trying to console her," sneered a voice; and the world raised its eyebrows and shook its head. Once arrived, Mrs. Clayton was perfectly at her ease. All her friends were there, all but one, at least, and at first it was with a sense of relief that she missed him. But hour after hour wore on, and there was no sign of Colonel d'Aguilar. First she felt restless, then a little impatient, then angry, and then she could have cried for the bitterness of the disappointment. It was four days since she had seen him, and then he had told her dis-

tinctly that he intended to be there. She was *ennuyée*, too, with the attentions of a certain Captain Blanchard, of the Guards, a very young man, who affected married women, particularly those whose domestic circumstances were not of the happiest. She could bear the suspense no longer.

"Harold," she said, addressing Lord Harold Erskine, who had come up to speak to her, "can you tell me if Colonel d'Aguilar is coming? I intrusted him with rather a delicate commission last week, and I am anxious to know how he has executed it." She could not help uttering that falsehood in her terrible consciousness that Lord Harold might suspect the cause of her anxiety to see him. To a more acute observer, the ill-concealed agitation of her manner would have betrayed her at once, but Lord Harold was the most unsuspicious of mortals.

"Upon my word I don't know; he told me on Sunday he should come. Some one said something about his having sprained his ankle getting out of a hansom, but I do not know whether it's true. I can find out, I think, if you particularly want to know."

"No, thank you," said Fee, forcing a smile, but deadly sick at heart; "it is not so important as all that."

It was getting dark—quite dark.

"How I wish I had ordered the carriage early!" she thought; "this party is fearfully dull."

Strangely enough, every one else seemed to find it charming, and was loud in praise of all the arrangements. The fire-works were to commence almost immediately, and people were dispersing in groups to different parts of the grounds from which they thought to get the best view of the fiery display. The elders of the party were of course content to witness it from the covered benches, which had been prepared by those who were most likely to know which was the best position. Fee sat down wearily on the edge of one of the seats; she had escaped from Captain Blanchard, and was alone. Suddenly she heard a voice pronounce her name, and a quick thrill of pleasure went to her heart. He had come at last! She forgot her anger, her impatience, and the weary hours she had spent waiting for him, and looked up with a glad smile.

"At last!" she said. "I had given you up long ago. I am so tired of all this," she added, in a whisper; "let us walk a little."

And then she perceived that he was slightly lame.

"Then it is true that you have sprained your ankle?" she uttered, hastily. "That kept you away—and it hurts you to walk."

"Not at all," he answered; "it is nothing. That did not keep me away."

"What then?" Fee asked, quickly.

Colonel d'Augilar was silent.

"What kept you away?" she repeated.

"I do not think I can tell you, Mrs. Clayton."

"Do tell me," she whispered, pressing his arm ever so slightly.

"I tried very hard to make a sacrifice," he answered, slowly, "and I failed."

"What sacrifice?"

"The sacrifice of my heart's desire to your peace."

Fee trembled, and was silent.

"See!" she said, "the fireworks are beginning;" and at that moment a blaze of light shot forth into the skies, and seemed to illumine the whole garden and river. There was a rustic garden-bench standing in a niche of arbutus and laurel.

"Let us sit down," Mrs. Clayton said. "I know your foot pains you."

Colonel d'Augilar looked at her a moment.

"You are so thinly clad," he exclaimed, "I fear you will take cold."

"I have my shawl," she answered, showing him a gold embroidered cashmere scarf that hung on her arm. He folded it round her tenderly and reverently.

"I was so disappointed when you did not come," Fee said presently. "I had just made up my mind to send for the carriage and go home. I came alone, you know."

"Alone! I thought Mr. Clayton was to be here?"

"He would not come. I think he would do anything rather than spend an hour in my company," she added, bitterly.

Colonel d'Augilar was silent. He could not speak without saying something hasty or passionate, so he would say nothing.

"I can not go on living like this," she broke out presently, "my life is a torment to me. You told me once I

should be miserable if I married him—are you glad your words have come true?”

“My God! Mrs. Clayton, what do you take me for?” he cried, moved to passion. “I glad—glad that you, whom I love with heart, soul and strength, are tied to a brute who makes your life a hell upon earth—glad that you are parted hopelessly from me, and that I can not lawfully stir a finger to help you when I am ready to lay down my life for you!”

“Forgive me!” Fee said, quickly, “I did not mean it. I feel so bitter—so mad sometimes—I scarcely know what I say. I know I am doing wrong in telling you such things; perhaps in your heart you despise me for it; but I have no one in the world to speak to but you. *Do* you think the worse of me for trusting you?” she continued, with an appealing look.

“Do not madden me by such questions,” he answered, hoarsely. “You know that in my eyes you are as pure, as much revered as an angel. No one could make me doubt you.”

“I am getting frightened of him,” she said in a whisper, and half-looking round; “he calls me horrible names sometimes, and yesterday he grasped my wrist, and bent my bracelet into it. See!” she said, holding the delicate arm close to Colonel d’Augilar; and the strong man writhed as he saw the great black bruise on the tender flesh. “He told me I was as low and degraded as the vilest of my sex, for I had sold myself to him for his money, hating him all the while. I think that was true.”

And by the bright rocket lights Colonel d’Augilar saw the great tears standing in Mrs. Clayton’s eyes. He felt his strength going; there was a choking sensation in his throat, yet for a moment he kept silence.

“Are you not sorry for me?” she whispered.

He leaned quickly back, and wound his arms over the twisted scroll-work of the bench. Else he knew he would have taken her in his arms, and kissed away her tears.

“Mrs. Clayton,” he said, after a while, “you must not say these things to me. You do not understand that men feel differently, more strongly than women. My blood is on fire at your wrongs and your misery. You forget how madly, how hopelessly I love you!”

Fee was not angry when he spoke such words to her.

were terribly unstrung, and she burst into a flood of tears. Some men—generally the strongest and the most generous—are deeply moved by the sight of a woman's tears. Colonel d'Aguilar was one of these. Mrs. Clayton's low, choking sobs wrung his heart. His resolution was gone in a moment, and he was at her side, covering her hands with kisses, and trying to soothe her.

"I think I am not well to-night—I am over-tired," she said, recovering herself; "if you will have my carriage sent for, I will go home."

He went at once, and did not return to her until it was ready; then he gave her his arm, and led her away without another word. She never looked at him as he put her into her carriage, and wished her a grave good-night; but when the door was closed, and they had passed through the gates, she threw herself back in a corner and sobbed such tears as she had never wept from the hour she was born until now.

She was looking her peril full in the face, and yet not combating it as she should have done. She knew, after what he had said, that she would be committing an actual sin in meeting him again on the old terms, and yet she could not make a resolution that she would not. If he had spoken words she ought not to have heard, it was not because he no longer respected her, but because he loved her so dearly. No harm should come of it; she would tell him to forget, as she would, what had been said. But almost before the thought crossed her mind, she rejected it as fallacious, impossible. "I will not decide to-night—I must have time to think," and she dried her tears, for fear she should meet her husband, and he might see traces of them. There were lights in the dining-room when she returned, and she would have entered it, but the footman stood in the way with a frightened face.

"Not in there, if you please, ma'am; master dined at home, and has a party of gentlemen."

At that moment there was a clinking of glasses, and a sound of laughter, in which the shrill peal of a woman's voice was distinctly audible.

Mrs. Clayton stood for a moment as if turned to stone; then she went upstairs without a word. It was evident she had not been expected home so early. Mechanically she sat down in her own room, and let the maid undress

her. She seemed to hear and see nothing, but only looked vacantly before her with eyes which saw nothing. Her maid spoke to her once or twice, but she did not answer.

"You are ill, ma'am, I am afraid," Harris said at last, stooping down to speak to her. Then Fee roused herself.

"No, Harris, I am not ill—only tired; and I think the fire-works dazzled my eyes—I can hardly see anything."

She was too stupefied to think. It seemed as if some heavy blow had fallen on her, and she scarcely realized it or knew what it was. Her mind was exhausted, and she slept heavily. The next day when she rode in the Park, as usual, every one said:

"How terribly ill Mrs. Clayton looks! She should not go out so much, or she will be dead before the end of the season."

"Dear Fee," said Winifred, riding up, "what ails you—you look worn out?"

"I think yesterday was too much for me," Mrs. Clayton answered.

"And yet you left so early; no one seemed to know when you went. Was it before the fire-works?"

Fee put her hand to her head.

"I can not remember," she said, slowly; "it seems strange, but I have forgotten all about it."

"My dear Fee, you must be ill."

"I think I am. Stop my horse, Winifred!" and Mrs. Clayton seemed for a moment to reel in her saddle. Winifred caught the bridle, and stopped her own horse.

"Oh, Lord Harold!" she cried suddenly, to the gentleman who rode beside her, "go to the other side of Fee, and hold her up; she is fainting."

In a moment he had his arm round her, and had lifted her into the saddle from which she had partly slipped. Mrs. Clayton recovered herself immediately.

"Thank you," she said, with a ghastly attempt at a smile; "a sudden giddiness. Take me home, Winifred, will you?"

"Yes, darling, you can not ride, though."

"I think I can."

"I saw my aunt's brougham at the top," said Lord Harold; "take Mrs. Clayton home in that, Winifred—I will explain to her—and let the grooms lead your horses."

In the days that were past she would have been frightened, perhaps indignant—now she felt a sense of relief.

“I weighed your love in the balance with Mr. Clayton’s money once,” she said, slowly, “and my choice has broken my heart. I am twenty. I have not a hope in the world,” and an agonized sigh broke from her. “I know that after to-night I dare not see you any more. If I had been good or wise enough to remember my duty, and keep from speaking of my misery to you, we might have gone on meeting as we have done. To-night we shall part forever.”

“Do not say that, Mrs. Clayton. How can I leave you to that man’s brutality?”

“How can you protect me from it?” she asked, sadly.

There was a great struggle in Colonel d’Aguilar’s mind before he answered.

“I only know of one way, and that I dare not tell you.” He paused and then continued:

“If I were rich I believe we might yet be happy together—we might leave England and travel far away from the censure of the world that does not understand such love as ours, or mocks at it. I could shield you from harm, from sorrow, from reproach and neglect, from all outer knowledge of evil, in the breadth and depth of my love. But I am poor, I am tied to my profession, and how can I tempt you to poverty, to dishonor, to a scorn that you would read in every face, and hear in every intonation? You see how I love you. I do not seek to deceive you, but for the very candor of my words you will banish me forever from the sunlight of your presence.”

“I am more wrong than you,” she uttered in a low, faint voice. “I ought to have known what my weakness would end in. I thought I could not be more wretched than I was an hour ago; but that was happiness compared with the anguish of feeling that I have lost your respect.”

He rose to his feet suddenly, and stood before her as pale as death.

“Will you never be convinced,” he said, passionately, “that my love for you is beyond self-seeking, beyond doubt? If you will it so, I will never see you again after to-night.”

If she had been less weak, or less unhappy, she would have bade him farewell then, and forever; but her nerves

"I do not like to spoil your ride, dear," Mrs. Clayton said faintly to Winifred.

"My dear Fee, do not think of it. Besides, I was just going home. Lord Harold," she whispered, "if Fee wants me, I shall stay. Will you tell Lady Grace?"

"I will go there at once, when I have seen my Aunt Douglas. Good-bye."

And having put both ladies carefully into the brougham, and directed the servant, he departed on his errand.

Mrs. Clayton remained the whole day on the sofa, scarcely speaking. Winifred would not leave her for a moment. She bathed her forehead, and watched and soothed her when she turned on her side and moaned.

"It is my head, my head," she murmured now and again. "I think I am going mad."

And then Winifred thought it time to send for a physician.

"It is a nervous attack," he said, when he had seen her; "the brain seems to have been overexcited. In a day or two Mrs. Clayton will be quite herself again. Let her be kept very quiet, and I will prescribe a soothing draught to be taken at night."

Lady Grace came herself in the afternoon, bringing the maid and Winifred's in-door habiliments.

"Don't take Winifred away," Fee said, piteously.

"No, love, I will not," Lady Grace answered soothingly; "she shall stay all night, if you like."

And the concession was all the greater that Lady Grace had a dinner-party at her own house that evening, and was rather dependent on Winifred's assistance in entertaining her guests.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE BRINK.

COLONEL D'AGUILAR returned from seeing Mrs. Clayton to her carriage, a prey to remorse and self-reproach. His first intention was to leave the party; but then it occurred to him that if by chance he and Fee had been seen together, their simultaneous disappearance might give rise to remark or conjecture. Her reputation was a thousand times dearer to him than it was to her husband. So he walked

all over the grounds, in spite of his ankle, which really pained him; spoke to all his acquaintance, and never so much as heard Mrs. Clayton's name mentioned. It was well that his mind was diverted for a time, or he felt his thoughts would have maddened him.

"Come home with me, D'Aguilar," said Mr. Hastings, drawing his friend's arm through his. "I have just sent to order my team round. You can't get back to Hounslow to-night, and I have a spare room at my place."

"Thanks, old fellow, not to-night. I must get back there somehow before to-morrow morning; but I will accept a lift part of the way gratefully."

"Come, Erskine," cried Errol, "are you ready?"

"Yes, my dear boy, but not to go with you, thanks. I have accepted a later and better invitation, and am going home with my aunt and Miss Eyre."

Mr. Hastings bit his lip; Captain le Marchant laughed.

"What fools men are when they fall in love," he said. "Fancy any one being simple enough to prefer the back seat of a close carriage on a hot night in June to tooling along behind four thorough-breds, breathing the delicious soft air, and smoking one of Hastings' Havanas. Madness, my dear Erskine, sheer madness."

"*Chacun à son goût*, Le Marchant. I am going to mine, and wish you joy of yours. Good-night, D'Aguilar. Good night, Hastings; thanks for the offer all the same. Your thorough-breds are getting impatient. It was as much as the grooms could do to hold them five minutes ago. *Au revoir*, all."

"Erskine's been getting a lesson in French lately, I should think," laughed Captain le Marchant. "Studying the purest Parisian accent under the auspices of Mademoiselle Alphonsine."

"Bah!" said a fourth man, who had just joined the group. "Erskine is a great deal too much in love with Miss Eyre to care about the society of French actresses."

"Miss Eyre speaks French better than any English-woman I ever heard," remarked Colonel d'Aguilar. "And a very charming, lady-like girl she is. Erskine's a good fellow, and I could not wish him anything better than to get her for his wife. I wish him success."

Mr. Hastings did not thank the speaker for that remark; but then Colonel d'Aguilar was profoundly ignorant of

anything more than the commonest acquaintanceship existing between Errol and Miss Eyre.

"Come," cried Errol, sharply, "it is time we were off. I hear an infernal clatter of hoofs. I dare say the horses are mad to start."

He was perfectly right in his conjecture, for by the time the friends had mounted, it required a considerable amount of science and strength to keep the animals on the broad gravel drive, and get them safely out of the iron gates on to the high-road. No night could have been more delicious, no surrounding circumstances more thoroughly enjoyable, and yet two at least out of the four men were unhappy and dissatisfied.

After that one night at the opera, Mr. Hastings had never had the least reason to believe that Winifred cared for or had forgiven him. She had resumed her former indifferent manner, and shot her little scornful sarcasms at him as before. She danced with him often, it was true, but then she took care to inform him that it was only because she had not strength of mind enough to deny herself the pleasure of dancing with any one who waltzed so splendidly. Once he had said to her, when she was more than usually captious:

"Say your worst to-night, Miss Eyre. I have played at being your slave long enough. I shall soon change my *rôle*. After to-night you must find another butt for your sarcasms."

Then she looked quickly up in his face, and said:

"Forgive me, I have been very rude and unkind!" and he had seen tears glistening in the bright eyes.

That ought to have been a lesson to him; he should have feigned indifference, and kept aloof from her, and then she would have been kind and repentant; but he forgave her for that one gentle look, and was as devoted to her as before. Not that he was ever a very humble slave—no man with the indomitable pride and will that was inherent in the Hastingses could be that; but he loved her deeply, he felt so intensely that he had something to atone to her for, and that made him bear tenfold more from her than he would have done from any other woman living. To-night he was chafing and angry. She had been with Lord Harold all the time of the fire-works and had danced twice with him afterward. And then, to crown it all, Erskine had

gone home with her—perhaps by her invitation. Mr. Hastings anathematized the caprice of women and his own folly.

It was five o'clock before Colonel d'Aguilar reached his quarters at Hounslow. He did not feel the least inclined to sleep, so he lighted a fresh cigar and opened his window. Twelve hours ago he had sat at the same window and resolved that he would not go to Mrs. Lynedon's garden-party.

"I shall have more chance of being alone with her there than I have ever had yet," he had thought. "I will not, lest I should be tempted to play the villain, and say that for which I could never forgive myself afterward. I don't think I'm such a blackguard at heart as to love her so passionately just because she is another man's wife. If her husband were reasonably good to her, I would have kept away and never seen her again, sooner than have come between them; but he is such an infernal brute, my blood boils when I think of him, and it seems her only comfort telling me of her misery. How in the name of Heaven can any human being treat such a beautiful, winning creature with harshness and brutality?"

And then a tempter had whispered to him that perhaps she would be disappointed at not finding him there, after he had promised to go, that he would be adding one more to all the sorrows and mortifications she had to endure. So he went—and we know the result.

He was sitting once more at the open window, thinking. His brain seemed to reel with confusion, and he was torn with regret, and yet he had new hope. The idea that she might still be his filled him with a wild, feverish kind of joy; but then the horror of dragging his idol into the dust made him shudder. She could never be less pure, less dear in his eyes; but if the world's scorn were pointed at her, would she not die of the shame? And then suddenly the story which Captain Culloden had told in the smoking-room at Endon Vale came into his mind, and he remembered with painful distinctness how Francis Clayton had applauded the revenge of the husband who would not sue for a divorce.

"Her life must be a hell upon earth with him," he tried to say to himself; "remorse could not make her more unhappy, if she had all my love to help her to bear it."

For two whole days Colonel d'Aguilar combated the temptation to see Mrs. Clayton. On the third his resolution failed him, and he went to the opera. He entered his sister-in-law's box, which was on the opposite side to Mrs. Clayton's. No one was there. He sat behind the curtains, and watched to see if the woman he loved came. She had not arrived yet; an older woman was in her place, talking volubly, laughing, and shrugging her white shoulders. Colonel d'Aguilar fancied he recognized the face. Where had he seen her before? And the man who sat in the shade, his face apparently bent down on the white shoulders—surely that must be Francis Clayton? Colonel d'Aguilar retreated still further behind the curtains, and raised his lorgnette. Yes, the man was Mr. Clayton beyond a doubt, and the lady, whose jeweled arm he was just stooping to kiss, was—yes, he remembered now Mme. de St. Geran, Mrs. Clayton's chaperon in Paris. Presently the door opened, and the watcher's heart throbbed as he saw Fee enter, deathly pale, but very beautiful. The Frenchwoman would have risen to give Mrs. Clayton her place, but the husband prevented it. Fee did not appear to notice the insult. She spoke a few courteous words to Mme. de St. Geran, and then turned to the stage. Colonel d'Aguilar could see her face well now, and his heart sunk within him as he saw how ill and unhappy she looked. Her eyes seemed unnaturally large, and had a wan, hunted look. He saw her glance wistfully round the house, and into the very box where he sat, but she could not see him. Then he knew that she turned away with a sigh of disappointment to the stage.

"I *will* see her!" he muttered, "not in the presence of that wretch Clayton, though. If he showed me that he hated me, and forbade her to speak to me, as he used, I could forgive him; but his civility, now I know its meaning, curdles my blood. She is sure to be at Lady Glenvil's ball—I will go there on the chance."

And ten minutes after Mrs. Clayton left her box, he went out, and drove to Lady Glenvil's house. Mrs. Clayton was there; he met her in the first room, leaning on Lord Glenvil's arm. He did not speak to her then, but passed on to greet his hostess, who was an old friend, and then he turned back and asked her to dance. She put her hand silently into his arm, and he felt it tremble violently.

"Let us go into the ball-room," she said, "I am cold."

"You do not look well," he answered, looking anxiously at her. "I do not think you ought to dance."

"Just this once," she whispered, and he put his arm round her. But in a minute or two she stopped. "You are right," she said, faintly; "I am not well enough to dance, I feel giddy."

He took her out into the conservatory, through which the fresh air blew softly. Silently he placed her on a couch, shadowed by a pyramid of rich flowers and leaves.

"I have been so ill since I saw you," she whispered. "I thought my senses had left me, and that I should die of my misery."

"I was mad, Mrs. Clayton. Will you not try and forget what I said? You know I would give my life to shield you from sorrow. My offense sprung from loving you too much."

"You did not cause all my suffering," Fee said, quickly; "and I was more to blame for your hasty words than even you."

And then her bosom heaving with indignant sighs, she told him of her new wrongs, of the hopelessness of her misery.

"Fee!" he exclaimed passionately, moved as he never in his whole life had been before, "why should our hearts be wrung and tortured as they are? We love each other. God knows how dearly and truly I love you, and I can not live and see you suffer now. Let me atone to you for what you have endured all these months of misery; there may, there must be happiness for us both, or there is no justice in the world!"

"Do not press me," she faltered; "I am so miserably weak I can not answer or resist you. My faculty of reasoning is gone, and yet I feel as if you were tempting me from Scylla to Charybdis. I *can not* save myself; if you love me, save me."

He saw the wild, imploring look in her frightened eyes, but he was carried away by passion.

"I swear to make you happy; you shall never in all your life have cause to repent trusting me." He stopped suddenly, for the sound of voices came toward them. "I will see you to-morrow," he whispered hurriedly, giving her his arm, and leading her back to the ball-room.

There had been an unintentional listener to part of their conversation. Lady Grace Farquhar, feeling the heat oppressive, had moved toward the open window, and was looking for some sheltered nook where she might sit quiet and alone for half an hour. Her head ached, and she did not feel inclined to talk. She went into the conservatory, which seemed empty, and was arranged in screens of plants and flowers. Behind one of these she was going to sit, when her attention was arrested by the tones of a well-known voice speaking in accents of despair, "I can not save myself; if you love me, save me." And then came the passionate rejoinder from another voice, that she knew too.

Lady Grace turned hastily and went back into the drawing-room, stricken with horror and regret. Then it had come to this, that she had dreaded and prayed against. Mr. Clayton's brutality had driven his wife to forget honor, duty, position, and self-respect. She did not excuse Fee, and yet she was too tender-hearted, too merciful, to condemn her, as most women would have done. It was not the disgrace, the scandal to the family, that made her aghast with horror—it was the pitfall of remorse and sorrow that she saw yawning at the poor girl's feet. She knew how purely idealistic was the romance of two lives unlawfully cast together, and she shuddered for the miserable awakening of both who had believed each other's love all-sufficient. How could she save them? Was there yet time, or was it already too late? Lady Marion Alton was too far away to help her, and poor Fee had no other friend nearer than herself. What if she spoke to her—pointed out the unknown misery that lay in such a future? Would she be believed? would her entreaties and prayers prevail, or would she be all the more stubborn in her determination?"

"There is no time to be lost," Lady Grace said to herself; "but what can I do?"

At this moment Colonel d'Aguilar came up to her. Had she not been possessed of infinite tact, in her fear and agitation she might have betrayed her knowledge, and forced him to immediate action by awakening his suspicions. But she talked to him in the old, kind way, of himself, his prospects, his family affairs; and he sat beside her a long time.

"Are you staying in London?" she asked presently.

"For to-night," he said; "I must be back at Hounslow to-morrow evening."

"Shall you be much engaged to-morrow?"

"Not after two o'clock. Why? Can I be of any service to you?"

"I think you can, if it is not troubling you too much," Lady Grace replied in the quietest, most matter-of-fact manner. "You can be of great use in serving a person in whom I am interested. It is too long and complicated a story to tell to-night, so if you could spare me an hour to-morrow afternoon I shall be glad."

"Certainly; will four o'clock suit you?"

"Perfectly. Then I may expect you?"

"I shall make a point of being punctual," he smiled.

"Good-bye, Lady Grace, I am going."

Lady Grace did not close her eyes that night, in her anxiety to light upon the best method of preventing the terrible disaster with which she had by the merest accident become acquainted. She longed to consult some one in her difficulty, and there was not a creature to whom she could turn. She had not decided on speaking of the matter to Colonel d'Aguilar, although she had asked him to come and see her, in the fear lest no other plan should present itself. She could not believe that her advice or entreaties would have weight with a man who had plunged half-way into the depths of passion and success. "I wish Madame de Montolieu were here," she thought; "I can not ask my husband; he would be furious with them both, and perhaps go at once to his nephew and warn him." She was thankful when the time came to rise.

"You do not look well, Grace," her husband said, and he was not wont to be very observant of her looks; "these late hours do not suit you."

"I shall drive the ponies this morning," she answered; "the fresh air will do me good."

At twelve o'clock Lady Grace started for her drive. She would have liked Winifred to accompany her, but Sir Clayton wished her to ride with him.

"I scarcely ever see her now," he said, peevishly; "she is always taken up with balls, and drives, and dress-makers."

Which was not true, for the girl devoted many an hour to reading and writing for him, when she would fain have

been somewhere else. She was very angry at feeling bored, and said to herself, "I owe everything to the kindness of these people, and to think that it should seem a trouble to me to do anything that can add to their comfort or pleasure."

Lady Grace drove into the Park. It was a little dull being alone, but the air revived her, and made her feel more herself. She passed by the extreme end of the Row. It was rather dull in that part; there were only three riders to be seen—a gentleman, a lady, and her groom. Lady Grace looked again, and recognized the two people on whom her whole thoughts were bent. There was Mrs. Clayton, pale, and with a wan, hunted expression in her eyes, and Colonel d'Aguilar, looking darkly handsome and resolute. But when he turned to his companion there was such tenderness in his gaze that no one could have passed them without thinking, "How he loves that woman!" Lady Grace saw it, and sighed deeply. "They have already passed the first barrier—the fear of what the world would say," she thought.

Mrs. Clayton and her companion had been too much engrossed with their own conversation to see Lady Grace, and when they had passed, she drew up by the rails and waited. "Clayton and Winifred are sure to come down this way," she said to herself; "I will stop for them." Ten minutes afterward they came up and she beckoned Winifred.

"Ride after Fee, dear, and join her," she whispered. "I can not explain to you now, but I wish it."

"If Sir Clayton objects?" Winifred whispered, interrogatively.

"I will make it right with him afterward."

Winifred did as she was told, and joined her friend. For the first time in her life, Mrs. Clayton received her coldly, and the girl, who was very sensitive, felt it keenly. Yet what could she do? Lady Grace's manner had been earnest, and Winifred could not bear to disobey her. She more than half suspected that the command had some reference to Colonel d'Aguilar. Fee scarcely spoke to her, and Sir Clayton seemed displeased at her joining any one else. The position was awkward, but she kept it. At last Sir Clayton said, angrily:

"I'm tired of this jog trot pace. If you do not feel inclined to ride any more to-day, we had better go home,"

And then Winifred was forced to say:

"I joined Fee, because Lady Grace wished it."

"Bah!" grunted the baronet; "whatever fancy has Grace taken into her head? She is always making some one uncomfortable with her ridiculous fancies and suspicions. I should have thought Marion was old enough to take care of herself. If she is not, she ought to be."

Meantime Lady Grace's prevision and thoughtfulness had their result. If Colonel d'Aguilar and Mrs. Clayton had been seen riding together alone, every one would have had something uncharitable to say about it. As it was, seeing her in the company of her husband's uncle and Winifred, people only said:

"How very much Colonel d'Aguilar seems to admire that pretty Mrs. Clayton!"

The day wore on, and as four o'clock approached, Lady Grace became very nervous and apprehensive. She had resolved how to act. But what, after all, if Colonel d'Aguilar should not come? If they should already be gone together? But at the best—if he came—could she hope that any persuasion of hers would induce him to forego the success which he had achieved, and which must now be the dearest hope of his heart? She tried to busy herself with some embroidery, then she took up a book, and at last she fairly paced up and down the room in her agitation. The servant entered the room with a note.

"I am not at home to any one except Colonel d'Aguilar," she said to him—"except Colonel d'Aguilar," she repeated, for fear of a mistake.

Four o'clock came—ten minutes past, and then the bell rang. In a moment the servant threw the door open and again announced:

"Colonel d'Aguilar."

CHAPTER VIII.

DRAWING THE ARROW-HEAD.

"I HAD almost given you up," Lady Grace said, giving him her hand.

He looked surprised, and smiled.

"I hardly thought military punctuality was required," he answered; "but I should have been here a little earlier,

only I met an old friend at the corner of the square, and stayed to speak to him."

"Colonel d'Aguilar!" said Lady Grace, with visible agitation, "I am not an adept at deceiving. The excuse with which I brought you here to-day was literally an excuse. The subject on which I have to speak to you is one of the last importance. Will you hear all I have to say?"

"Certainly I will."

And he bent his head courteously.

"I unintentionally heard a part of your conversation with Marion Clayton last night, and it breaks my heart to think of the poor motherless child, without a friend near to save or help her, falling into the open snare which you have laid at her feet."

Colonel d'Aguilar started.

"Do you take me for a wanton seducer of innocence, Lady Grace?" he asked, indignantly.

Tears streamed from the kind eyes.

"No, I do not," she answered. "God help you! I think you are carried away and deluded by a passion that has been too strong for you."

"It is not passion!" he cried hotly; "you misjudge me. I love her so dearly that I think I could sacrifice anything to her; it is because I believe faithfully that I can make her happy that I have persuaded her to leave her husband, whose malice and brutality are absolutely devilish!"

"And do you believe that the world's scorn and a life of shame can make her happy?"

"I believe that my love could make her happy in spite of surrounding circumstances."

There was a pause; and Lady Grace looked at him tenderly and pitifully.

"Listen to me," she said sadly. "My words may seem harsh and cruel to you, and yet I should fail in my duty to you both if I left them unsaid. Passion and sin have cast a glamour before your eyes—you do not see things as they are or would be. Let me tell you. Nearly two years ago, when you had a good position and an honorable name to offer her, Marion Alton would not marry you, although she loved you, because she felt that wealth and luxury were necessary to her happiness. Is it not so?"

"She thinks differently now," Colonel d'Aguilar answered hastily.

"Now," continued Lady Grace, the tears welling up into her eyes at the harshness of the words she was forced to utter—"now you have neither name nor position to give her. Have you remembered that she has been nursed in luxury? that she has no fortune of her own, and that she has not the remotest idea of managing a house, or even dressing herself? Forgive me if I speak the truth boldly—this is no time for false delicacy. Your income is scarcely more than she has been used to spend on her dress and amusements, and her health is far too delicate to admit of any hope that she would be able to struggle against poverty and contempt. You should be brave enough to face the truth. Remember that not one of the wives of your brother officers would notice her. She would not have a single woman friend to turn to in her need; she would be subject to the insolent sneers, or still worse familiarity of the very tradespeople who served her, and the servants who waited on her. She can not walk—you could not afford to keep a carriage for her to drive in, or a horse to ride. She loves dress—you could not prudently gratify her expensive tastes; she would have no opportunity of going into society, which she loves; all the houses where she has been a brilliant, valued guest would be closed against her. Do you believe in your heart that your love would weigh against all these terrible mortifications?—do you believe that when you saw her broken-hearted, discontented, miserable, and stricken with remorse, your love would be as tender—as unselfish—as true?"

Colonel d'Aguilar hid his face in his hands, and groaned aloud.

"I can not—I will not give her up!" he cried, his voice full of anguish.

"That is it—you will not," Lady Grace returned, sadly; "you are blinded by passion; you try to delude yourself into the belief that you are seeking to insure her happiness by urging her to sin and ruin. Oh, Colonel d'Aguilar, have pity on her! You know that there was never in the world yet a wrong like that which you contemplate that did not meet with bitter sorrow and punishment. Think how young, how fair, how delicate she is, and have pity on her. If you love her so dearly, how could you bear to know that she was the object of men's sneers and women's contempt?"

Put your words to the proof, and sacrifice your desire to her welfare."

"I can not argue against you, Lady Grace," he said, in a broken voice; "but I do not think you are altogether right. Will she be happy, think you, subject to the horrible cruelty of that man, Clayton? If I leave her, who am the only comfort in her misery, what will she have left? The light will be gone out of my life, and out of hers."

"We may overcome an affliction that we have not earned by our own fault; but the misery that we bring on ourselves by a willful sin, has a bitterness that can never lose its sting. Oh, Colonel d'Aguilar, let me entreat you from the very depths of my heart to give her up—to cast the temptation away from you! I feel my powerlessness to convince you, but I pray you to think."

He raised his eyes to her face with a glance that showed how deeply he felt her words.

"Give me time," he said, in a hollow, unnatural voice, and his eyes rested on the clock. "Will you leave me here alone for an hour, and let me lock myself in? When you come back, I will give you my answer."

Lady Grace rose without another word and left the room. Then she heard the key turn in the lock behind her.

The man who had looked danger and death in the face, and never quailed before it—who had met every trial, every difficulty, and every disappointment with the strength of his will, and conquered it, bowed his head on his arms and sobbed. Very rarely do mortals see the tears that anguish wrings from strong men; those who do, pray God they may never witness them again. There came a time when the heart of this man, now torn by passion and misery, recognized and owned the fruit of a bitterness which seemed even unto death.

Lady Grace Farquhar's words were ringing in his ears, and he knew and felt their truth. If he had loved less, he would never have plucked out the passion that cankered in his soul; he would have shut his eyes to the misery that he might bring on the frail, delicate woman whose fate lay in his hands. The first scales had fallen from his eyes, and he saw clearly. There might, perhaps (even that was doubtful) be a short moment of happiness, of drugged unconsciousness, and then a bitter, terrible awakening—a long night of darkness and despair. Could a woman who was

really pure-hearted bear all the wounds, the stings of a shameful life? When the hour had passed, and Lady Grace returned, she knew his resolve from the look of terrible suffering in his eyes.

"I have resolved to do as you wish, Lady Grace," he said.

"You are a brave man. God bless you!" and she took his hand and kissed it.

He turned to go.

"You will not see her again, Colonel d'Aguilar?"

"Never, please God," he answered, "except under altered circumstances."

"It would be scarcely safe to write to her, and yet—she must know."

"I must write a few words; may I intrust them to you to give her when she is quite alone?"

"Yes; but you will not let her think I know anything of the matter."

"I will not."

He sat down and wrote—three sentences only—then he sealed the note and handed it to Lady Grace.

"God bless you!" she said again, and he went quickly out.

During the time that the circumstances I have just narrated took place in Eaton Square, Marion Clayton was sitting in her drawing-room, thinking. She had sent the carriage back to the stables, and ordered herself to be denied to all visitors. As she lay reclined on the low, soft couch, her eyes closed and heavy, she could not at first realize the position in which her own act had placed her. When, after a time, it dawned upon her that she had consented to leave home, friends, society, luxury, everything she had valued, for the sake of a man's love whom in the former days she had cast aside, she shuddered and trembled. Did she in truth love him so much as to feel that he could make up to her for the loss of all these things?

"I do love him," she said to herself, "with all my heart; existence without him would be worse than death." And yet a vague fear and regret haunted her. "Could I bear the degradation? Would he love me when I could no longer claim his respect, and when the world's scorn was pointed at me?"

As she thought this, a deadly chill crept into her heart.

That morning Colonel d'Aguilar had won from her a partial consent to leave her husband for him; he was to make all preparations, to get leave of absence from the Horse Guards, and to arrange everything for their going abroad. When all these matters were concluded, he would see her again, and settle everything finally. Meanwhile they would meet constantly.

She sat for hours in the same position; her mind tossed to and fro by the waves of doubt, of hope, of despair—and yet no light seemed to come to her.

“I shall see him for an hour to-night at the opera,” was the gladdest thought which came to soothe her.

It was nearly seven o'clock, when a servant entered.

“Lady Grace Farquhar is below, ma'am. She would have me come and ask if you would see her. I said you would not see any one.”

“Yes, I will see her,” Mrs. Clayton said, wearily.

She was tired of her own thoughts. Presently Lady Grace came in. It was in her heart to go up and kiss the poor child, whose misery, whose mental tortures she read all too plainly, in the pale, worn face; but she refrained from any unusual demonstration of feeling and only greeted Mrs. Clayton in her usual kind manner.

“I hope you will not look upon me as an intruder, my dear,” she said; “but I wanted to see you to-night before I go to Lady Ashton's. You know I have taken a stall at this great fancy fair, and Laura Ashton is anxious to join me in it. I thought before answering her, I should like to give you the refusal of a share in it.”

“When is it to be?” Mrs. Clayton asked.

“To-morrow fortnight.”

Fee shook her head.

“Thank you for thinking of me, Lady Grace, but I am not equal to the exertion. Lady Ashton will be a more zealous assistant than I should, and I do not feel quite in spirits for it.”

“You must take care of yourself,” Lady Grace said, kindly. “I am afraid you overtask your strength by too much excitement.”

And then the two ladies talked of general matters for a little while, until the elder one took leave. She had said good-bye, and then turned as though she had forgotten something.

"I have a note I promised to give you. Colonel d'Agui-
lar was calling upon us to-day. He is suddenly recalled to
Hounslow, and hearing I intended coming to see you, in-
trusted me with a note of excuses for not seeing you to-night
at the opera."

I do not think any motive less tender, less compassion-
ate, would have induced gentle Lady Grace to utter a will-
ful falsehood; as it was, it caused her many a pang of self-
reproach both before and after its utterance.

As she finished speaking she left the room. A kind of
numbness seized on Marion Clayton's heart, as she stood
quite still—the letter had dropped from her fingers.

"I shall not see him to-night," she said, looking vacant-
ly at the seal. Then she opened it reverently and carefully,
taking pains not to break the wax. Women are always
tender and reverent in opening the letters of the men they
love.

When she had read the few words the note contained,
it dropped from her hand, and she stood still in the same
place without moving. Her eyes were fixed, though she
saw nothing; she seemed hardly to have feeling or con-
sciousness, and yet the roll of the carriages and wagons be-
neath in the street was painfully audible, and the silvery
chimes of the magnificent drawing-room clock seemed un-
naturally loud to her. After awhile she picked up the
note, and read it again mechanically:

"I shall never see you again. Need I ask you not to
misjudge me? It is because I love you so well that I give
up the sunshine of my life and go out into the darkness.

"IVORS D'AGUILAR."

The renunciation had come from him—from him who
had seemed to love her so passionately. She had heard
that when men loved with all their heart and soul they
recked little of prudence, of honor, of aught but their mad
passion.

She turned away with a great, gasping sob. Then she
went to her room with a calm, quiet face, and death in her
heart, and rang for her maid to dress her. At dinner she
smiled and talked to her husband's friends, and afterward
she went to the opera. "Favorita" was performed that
evening. A very gentlemanly young man—a Scotch con-

nection of her husband—accompanied her. Some time afterward he said to his mother:

“They say women of the world become heartless. I can not believe it, for I never saw a woman cry as Mrs. Clayton did the night I went with her to hear ‘*Favorita*.’”

Within a few weeks of the close of the season, a very beautiful Frenchwoman came to London, and was received at once into the best society. Her story was a strange one, and one that excited a great deal of interest. She had been married at fifteen to a Russian prince, many years older than herself, and of dissolute character. At first he had loved her passionately; then, as he found it impossible to overcome her coldness and indifference, he had come to dislike, and treat her with harshness. He had taken her away to Russia very young, very friendless, and intensely unhappy. There he had neglected her, and made open love to other women before her eyes. She might, had she chosen, have indemnified herself for her husband’s indifference by the admiration which followed her steps and pursued her whenever she appeared in public. She had two children—boys; and all her love seemed bound up in them. Then they died; the cold of Russia killed them, and she almost died of the grief. The physician at St. Petersburg insisted that she should return at once to Paris. “It is the only way to save her life,” he said to her husband. So after three years’ weary absence she returned to her birth-place, and there, after a time, she recovered. In her despair she sought the consolations which her church can so ably give to sorrow, and, softened by the gentle influence of religion, she tried to win back her husband to whose affection she had before been utterly indifferent. In vain. At the French Court she was greatly admired and sought after. A young man of high rank conceived a wild passion for her. He was so handsome, so distinguished, no one believed she could resist the devotion he so constantly and so openly offered her. It could scarcely be affirmed that she was utterly unmoved by his passion, but all the world said that she never gave him any undue encouragement. Still, Prince Kelikoff became jealous. One evening the princess dropped her bouquet; M. de Ligny picked it up, bowed over it, and returned it to her. Prince Kelikoff chose to imagine the accident was prearranged, and that De Ligny had taken the opportunity of concealing a note

among the flowers. He snatched the bouquet violently from his wife's hands. In her surprise she made some resistance; he grasped her arm and pressed the sharp-pointed diamond bracelet unintentionally into the flesh. A little jet of blood spurted forth. The enraged De Ligny beheld it, and in a moment Prince Kelikoff lay stunned and bleeding on the ground. A crowd closed round them at once; with some difficulty the angry men were separated, but of course only blood could wipe out such a stain. A meeting was arranged; the seconds made the customary formal attempts at reconciliation without success.

Valerie de Zelikoff knew well enough what the end of such a quarrel must naturally be. She knew her husband's fierce, indomitable temper, and she guessed the rage that had filled De Ligny's heart at seeing her treated with violence and indignity. Her heart was torn—in very truth she cared more for the handsome, accomplished man who loved her so desperately, than for her dissolute, gray-haired, indifferent husband. But her religion had taught her faithfully the duty of sacrificing everything to right. The thought that her husband might be wounded, perhaps to the death, in a quarrel of which she had, however innocently, been the cause, was terrible to her. And yet she saw no means of preventing it.

The morning of the duel arrived, no one was on the ground but the seconds, a doctor, and his assistant. The doctor stood near De Ligny. Prince Zelikoff was known as a deadly shot. One, two, three, two flashes, two reports, a wild shriek, and a fall. And yet neither of the duelists was harmed or scathed. At the moment of firing, the doctor's assistant had flung himself in front of the prince, had turned up the hand which held the pistol, and received De Ligny's shot through his shoulder. De Ligny, the seconds, and the doctor rushed toward him; the prince had already raised his head, and recognized Valerie de Zelikoff, his wife. The doctor explained it. He was an old friend of the family; she had gone to him and besought him to allow her to be present at the duel, urging that she believed herself able to prevent it, and after much hesitation he had yielded. The wound was not a serious one; many a woman would have been glad to purchase the reputation for heroism that came undesired to Valerie de Zelikoff at so small a price of pain. The action was thoroughly French, and as

such intensely appreciated by all Paris. It was a crown of glory to her husband, and flattered his vanity to a degree that made him love her again as in the olden days. How often man's love (the sort perhaps that hardly deserves the name) is won through their vanity. Great as the triumph was to Zelikoff, was the defeat to De Ligny. His *amour propre* could not recover from such a terrible blow; he had been prepared to risk his life to a well-known deadly shot to avenge an insult on the woman he loved, and she had received his bullet in her own tender flesh to save the husband who had so grossly wronged her. He went away until the affair had blown over, and then returned to Paris, with a very young, fair wife, who had been taken from a convent to marry him. She adored him; he was cold and indifferent to her; nay, he almost hated her, when, six months later, Prince Zelikoff died of a fever, and the beautiful Valerie was left a widow at twenty-two. She passed a year in seclusion, then she again went into society, and, as has been said, came to London a few weeks before the close of the season. She was staying at the house of Lady Dora Annesly, Mr. Hastings' cousin, and her greatest friend. When Lady Dora was in Paris, the Princess Zelikoff had taken her everywhere into the highest circles, and made her welcome at all the great houses. Lady Dora was only too pleased at being able, in a measure, to return the courtesy which had been shown her.

Mr. Hastings saw a great deal of the beautiful Frenchwoman, and admired her exceedingly. She was not like any Frenchwoman he had met before—she did not talk much, or gesticulate, or seem to desire admiration. She was pale, large-eyed, essentially *spirituelle*. The chief fascination she possessed for him was the low, musical tone of her voice.

"I wish you would come more often to us, Errol," his cousin said; "we see so little of you. I am so anxious that Madame Zelikoff's visit to us should be a pleasant one, and she always seems happier, brighter, when you are there?"

"You do me too much honor," Mr. Hastings said mockingly.

"It is no empty compliment, indeed, Errol," returned Lady Dora. "I am sure she likes you much better than any one else who come here. You ought to feel flattered; the Princess de Zelikoff's coldness and indifference to men's

attention has almost become a proverb in Paris. I am surprised you do not prefer a high-bred, graceful woman of the world, to an uninformed, simple country-girl like that Miss Eyre. You see I have discovered your secret."

"Some men are foolish enough to prefer innocence in women to a knowledge of the world, Dora," Mr. Hastings answered, coldly.

"Some men are foolish enough for anything," retorted Lady Dora, pettishly.

CHAPTER IX.

HURST MANOR

MORE than once Sir Howard Champion had met his granddaughter, Winifred Eyre, in society. He had spoken very little to her, but watched her closely; and the result of his quiet scrutiny was that he felt unfeignedly pleased with her. She was graceful, natural, and lady-like, and possessed a certain frankness of manner which could not fail to win for her liking and admiration. Not that she lacked the stateliness and dignity that he thought so indispensable to a well-bred woman.

One day he called on Lady Grace Farquhar. She and Winifred were sitting alone together in the drawing-room.

"My dear," he said to Winifred, "we must not be strangers any longer. My other granddaughters are coming to stay with me in Hirstshire after the season is over, and I want Lady Grace to spare you. You will not refuse?"

Winifred looked up at her friend.

"I think you would like to go dear, would you not?" Lady Grace said quickly.

Winifred answered a little hesitatingly in the affirmative. She would rather not have gone; but she could not bear to seem stubborn, or as if she bore malice.

The London season was over, the Park deserted, the handsome carriages gone from the streets. Cabs laden with luggage toiled wearily over the hot macadamized roads, and those unfortunate folks whom the hard task-master, business, chained to the sultry, airless city, went panting along, wiping the heat and dust from their aching brows,

and longing for Epping Forest, Bushy Park, or the Thames, as Tantalus may have longed for a draught of the limpid water flowing just out of his reach. Winifred was staying at Hurst Manor with all her cousins—Flora and Reginald Champion, and Laura and Ada Fordyce, Lady Valanton's daughters. She had met the two latter constantly in town, and been on speaking terms with them; but nothing more. The elder was rather plain, but aristocratic-looking, and very proud. Ada, the younger, was pretty, good-tempered, and unaffected. She took to Winifred at once, and soon became very fond of her; but her sister joined with Flora in being disdainful and cold to the farmer's daughter. There were two or three young men, friends of Reginald's, staying in the house, and Mr. Maxwell, to whom Miss Champion was now formally engaged. Both her mother and grandfather had been very anxious to see her well married, but neither were in their hearts contented that their proud, handsome Flora was to be the wife of a senile old gourmand like Mr. Maxwell. Still they made no objection. The wedding was to take place in a month's time, and the delighted lover proposed to make unheard-of settlements. To Winifred, the idea of such an unequal marriage seemed horrible; the Ladies Fordyce thought nothing of it—had not their own father been forty-five years older than their mother? Reginald de-claimed vehemently against it to Winifred when they were alone.

"It is unnatural; it makes my blood boil," he said, indignantly, "to think of Flo, who is clever and handsome, binding herself to a greedy, foolish man, whom no woman on earth could care for, and who does not know what love means, except for his own appetite and comfort. However, she seems to have made up her mind to it, so there is no use in my trying to prevent it."

The idea of marriage with Mr. Maxwell had hardly seemed so painful or degrading to Flora until she came back to Hurst Manor and met Lord Lancing again. He had not been in town at all during the past season, and she flattered herself she had forgotten him. The first time she saw him after her return she was undeceived. He had congratulated her on her engagement, regretfully, she thought, and yet as if his regret was for her sake, not his own. That was very hard for a proud woman to bear;

every time she met him it seemed harder. How she longed and prayed for the marriage to be over, that she might be away out of sight and hearing of the man whose indifference stung her to the quick. And then, to make the last hours in the home she had never cared for more unbearable, her detested cousin was always reminding her, by her hateful presence, of the fact that, but for her, she might have been the wife of a young, handsome patrician instead of a middle-aged man of plebeian origin. Sir Howard's ill-advised and open display of partiality for his newly acknowledged granddaughter was even more distasteful to Winifred than to her cousins. She felt it made them dislike, and Mrs. Champion cold and ungracious toward her. Flora and Laura Fordyce resented their grandfather's treatment of her openly. Ada did not mind it in the least.

"It is absurd of us to be annoyed at grandpapa's thinking so much of her," she would say. "We never took half the pains to please or conciliate him that Winifred does."

"I hate such toadyism," answered her sister. "At all events, she might have the decency to make her endearments and cajoleries a little less public."

"Nonsense, Laura, what you say is untrue. She makes use of no cajoleries. She never calls him anything but sir, not even grandpapa."

"That is because she can not get out of her low ways," Flora interrupted, spitefully.

"And as for toadyism," proceeded the little champion, "why *should* she toady him? She has refused to live with him, and Lady Grace Farquhar treats her likes a daughter. She is in as good a position as any one of us, you know, Flo. I am sure it is from sheer kindness of heart that she takes such trouble to amuse grandpapa—plays, and sings, and reads to him, and rides about everywhere with him. It can not be any pleasure to her."

"She gets very well paid for it. Grandpapa never gave any of us such a handsome present as that diamond necklet he sent for from Hancock's for her the other day."

"I suppose she will have as many diamonds as she can wear some day," laughed Ada, a little maliciously. "Lord Harold Erskine has all his mother's jewels, and you know, Flo, she has only to hold up her hand to be Lady Harold Erskine!"

"I do not know anything of the sort," Miss Champion answered, coldly. "I dare say she told you so!"

"Indeed you are quite wrong. She tried to make me believe he did not care at all for her; but any one can see how devoted he is to her. I wonder why she does not marry him. I would to-morrow if he asked me."

"Ada, I am surprised at you!" said her sister, severely. "It is most indelicate to speak in that manner."

"Nonsense, Laura, do not be so dreadfully prim. I mean it. I would have Lord Harold Erskine to-morrow if he asked me, and you would have Mr. Hastings, of Hazell Court, I know."

"I hope you may both get the objects of your choice," said Flora, a little scornfully; "but here comes the paragon, making love to Reginald, in the absence of better sport."

"I have news for you, Laura," said the young man, jumping in at the open window; "indeed, news for you all. Hastings is not going to Norway in his yacht, but is coming down to the Court, and has invited several people with him, so we shall all be enlivened a little, I hope, in this dull hole. Lady Dora Annesly is to play hostess, so there is sure to be plenty of fun."

"And pray, where did you get your information?" asked Miss Champion.

"From headquarters, Flo; don't look so scornful and unbelieving. I almost wonder you deign to ask anything about it. You know it can't matter to you, now, if all the Adonises and Parises came into Hirstshire—you have your own lover to attend to. I forget what mythological personage Sir Howard compared him to."

"When you think you have made quite sufficient impression on us by your knowledge of Lempriere, perhaps you will give us a little of this interesting information?"

"Well, then," resumed Reginald, "I met Orestes and Pylades, that is to say, Hastings and Captain le Marchant, about a mile from the Court; so you see, Flo, I could not have a better authority. Lady Dora is bent on making the old place lively. I hear she has persuaded Hastings to give some private theatricals; so now all you young ladies will be mad to be invited to take parts. I'll lay any odds Winifred gets asked to play."

"Reginald, how absurd you are!" cried Winifred; "I

never acted in my life. I am quite sure Lady Dora Annesly would never dream of asking me."

"Very singular if she did!" sneered Miss Champion.

"I don't suppose she would of her own accord," retorted Reginald, "but Hastings will be sure to want Winifred."

"Why?" asked Lady Laura Fordyce, elevating her eyebrows.

"Ask no questions, Laura. If you do not already know, you will soon find out."

And Reginald went off whistling, delighted at having succeeded in provoking his sister and cousin.

"Really, Flora, I wonder you never made an attempt to make Reginald more civilized," said Lady Laura, crossly; "he is unbearably cubbish. When I see him it makes me feel thankful I have no brother, although, of course, one does not like the title going to some one else."

"I dare say, dear," retorted Flora, "that if Reginald had been your brother you would have made him perfect long ago. You have so much tact and *savoir faire*."

"Come, Flora, don't be cross," cried Lady Ada; "let us go and play croquet. Winifred and I will play you and Laura."

But Miss Champion declined, seconded by Laura, and the two younger girls went off together, and meeting Reginald and one of his friends in the garden, spent a very pleasant afternoon at their favorite amusement.

Some days after Lady Dora Annesly arrived at the Court with her husband, a young, good-tempered man, very fond of her, and not in the least inclined to be jealous. Lady Dora was a flirt by nature and habit. She was a pretty blonde, very sprightly, very light-hearted, rather clever, and a good deal admired by men.

"I don't care for women," she used to say ingenuously; "not as a rule, at least—you can never rely upon them. Either they get jealous, or spiteful, or offended, or else they pretend to be shocked at what you say or do, and repeat it to some else with a false coloring. If they are deceitful, and seem to admire everything you do, it is worse still. You may quite sure the world will have a pretty catalogue of your improprieties then. Now I mean no harm; my intentions are exceedingly honorable, and I am very fond of my husband, but I like to have a sentimental flirting kind of acquaintance with men; I like them to flat

ter me and pay me attention, and pretend to be desperately in love with me. Only they must know where to stop. If I find that a man does not understand me, and can not take all my mock compliments and pretty speeches at their true value, but wants to go blundering on into familiarity and a serious *affaire de cœur*, I pull him up short all at once, and turn him off, and then he is out of my good graces forever and a day, and only comes back as the commonest acquaintance. A man of tact and breeding ought always to know whether a woman is in earnest or not. A woman never. If a man has the true art, he will always be able to make a woman believe that he is desperately, hopelessly in love with her. Playing at being in love is the most charming recreation in the world, only people who do not know the use of edged tools should be careful in handling them. Is it not so, George?"

And the little lady would finish her tirade with a mischievous glance at her husband, accompanied by the merriest of laughs.

"Ah, Dora," he would answer, shaking his head with mock gravity, "when will you learn the dignity and state that become matronhood?"

"Never, dear, I hope; that is, until I get old and ugly, and no one cares about me. But don't let us anticipate anything so horrible," she would add, pretending to shudder.

There had been a very decided flirtation between Mr. Hastings and Lady Dora some years ago, before she was married or engaged; they sometimes revived it even now. He let her have her own wayward will in the matter of coming to stay at the Court, and inviting guests, and turning the old house upside-down for private theatricals, and in return she was very bright and kind to him, and consulted his pleasure in every possible way.

"Errol," she said after breakfast one morning, "you must tell me whom you wish to take part in the theatricals. Shall I ask that pretty Miss Eyre?"

"Do," answered Mr. Hastings, with more than usual energy; "I am sure she will play well."

"Comedy or tragedy?"

"Oh, neither. Melodramas are the best things for private performances."

"One of those charming little French pieces, for instance."

"The very thing. Then you want to have *tableaux-vivant*, do you not?"

"Oh, yes, half a dozen, at least."

"Then pray manage, my dear Dora, that they follow quickly one upon the other, or else the audience will be yawning themselves to death before the evening is half over."

"Now, Errol, leave things to me, and do not interfere. You remember, I hope, how beautifully our own entertainment went off last winter?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly, and the flaming accounts of it that appeared afterward in the 'Star of the West' and 'Belgravian Chronicle.' When are you going over to ask Mrs. Eyre?"

"Oh, you unfortunate men!" laughed Lady Dora, "I believe you are all born, and all die, without a grain of tact. How could I, a comparative stranger, invade the mansion of one of your great county ladies, and passing over her and her magnificent daughter, make my overtures to their guest? Know you not, my dear and innocent cousin, that many preludes and formulas must be gone through before there is the slightest chance of your wish being obtained? Let me initiate you. First, you must ride over to Hurst Manor and beg of Mrs. Champion to call upon me, your cousin, who am playing hostess at your house. Then, when she has done me the honor of a visit, I shall speedily return it, and express a vague hope that the young ladies of her house will give me their assistance in the formation of my *tableaux-vivants*. I shall let it be understood, of course, that all the parts are of equal fascination, but requiring different styles. Then we must have a little time to become intimate: after that there will be morning calls, and confidences, and we shall no doubt be able to arrange everything to our own satisfaction and theirs."

"What a clever little head you have, Dora; and how charmingly you think of everything!" smiled Errol, kissing the little white hand that was laid upon his arm.

Just then George Annesly came into the room.

"You have come in time, George," laughed his wife. "Errol was flattering me, and actually kissed my hand."

"He is very welcome, darling," said stalwart George Annesly, smiling, "as long as no one has the right to kiss your face;" and he put his arm around her slender waist and gave her a hearty kiss.

"You see, I can't make him jealous, Errol," pouted Lady Dora, well pleased in her heart for all that.

"George has married a woman in a thousand," Errol answered, "and he has the sense to know it." And then the three went on talking and laughing in the happiest of humors.

Lady Dora made all her plans, and Errol carried them out. He called on Mrs. Champion, gave her some hints about the tableaux, and a desire for her co-operation. She responded immediately by calling on Lady Dora, and two days afterward Dora appeared at Hurst Manor. The ladies, especially the young one, were charmed with her, she was so bright, so fascinating. It would be charming to take part in the tableaux. "Would they think over some fitting subjects for groups?" Lady Dora asked, the artful little lady having all the while arranged them in her own mind.

"You, Miss Champion, and your cousin Lady Laura, must be in something magnificent and statuesque; you, Lady Ada, shall be bright and bewitching. I shall not ask your services in the tableaux, Miss Eyre; I want you to help me in something else."

"I think, if you would leave me out altogether," Winifred hinted, modestly; but Lady Dora would not hear of such a thing.

There were a great many calls, conversations, hints, proposals, and suggestions, and finally everything was arranged precisely as the mistress of the ceremonies had intended it should be. Then of course there were rehearsals at the Court: lunches, dinner-parties, all manner of pretexts for getting the young people together to perfect their parts. Scenery and dresses came down from London. Mr. Hastings spared neither trouble nor expense, and the Court ball-room was transformed into an elegant theater. All the country round was invited; there were to be two hundred guests.

Winifred's heart beat fast the first time she visited Hazell Court. She remembered how in the olden days that stately gray mansion into which she had never hoped to enter had been invested in her child-like dreams with all the romance which she had read of or fancied. Afterward it had been dearer still as the home of the man who had been to her a hero, a demi-god. The time came back to her

when she had been the simple farmer's daughter, so proud, so happy to be noticed by the handsome master of Hazell Court. How her heart had sunk within her as she saw him paying court to the beautiful, aristocratic women who seemed then so far above her; and how little she had dreamed of the advent of a time when she should be a more honored, more longed-for guest than they?

Mr. Hastings came out to meet the party of ladies who had ridden over to the Court. He went up to Winifred first, and took her in his strong arms and lifted her from the saddle.

"Welcome!" he whispered; "this is a time I have often longed for."

When all the party had dismounted, he would have taken her to see the house.

"No, Errol, I really can not permit it now!" exclaimed Lady Dora Annesly; "there will be plenty of time another day. There is a whole pile of playbooks that we must get through before dinner, and I particularly want Miss Eyre to assist my choice."

"As you please," returned Errol, a little vexed. "Come, Le Marchant, Lancing, Champion—we shall only be in the way until the ladies have made all their arrangements."

And the gentlemen walked away, not entirely to the satisfaction of all the ladies.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE PICTURE-GALLERY.

JUST at first, Winifred felt exceedingly nervous at the idea of acting, and acting, too, before a large audience.

"You *must* excuse me, Lady Dora. I could not possibly attempt it. I should most likely fail signally, and disgrace the whole affair."

"You are only a little nervous, my dear Miss Eyre, I assure you. I should not ask you, only I feel quite certain that you will make an admirable actress. But I will tell you what you shall do. Take your part, learn the principal scenes thoroughly, and act them over to yourself. If, after that, you feel certain of not succeeding, I promise my consent to your throwing up the part."

To this Winifred agreed, and three days after when she met Lady Dora, said:

"I have done as you told me, and feel a little more confidence in myself. I should like to try an act."

There was another inducement too. Mr. Hastings was to play with her, and her *rôle* was to reproach him passionately, to scorn him, to be jealous of him, and yet to love him all the while. She studied her part intently, but she felt all the while that when the time came for her to act, with him she would take to her *rôle* naturally and easily.

Mr. Hastings was vexed when he read over the play that had been chosen.

"I wish it had been any other, Dora."

"Why, Errol? It is a charming play; I have seen it acted, and you will look so handsome in the dress."

"Pshaw!" said Errol, "I am not a woman."

"And it is only women who care to be admired and to look handsome," laughed Lady Dora.

"But, seriously, Dora, it is not too late to change it."

"I would not change it for the world, Errol."

"Then please let Le Marchant or Lancing take my part."

"Now, Errol, don't be disagreeable," pouted Lady Dora, "you know you play so well. I suppose you do not care to make love to me?"

"Nay, Dora," smiled Mr. Hastings, good-humoredly, "that is the only pleasant part."

The rehearsals continued almost daily. Winifred did not throw very much energy into her part; and Lady Dora felt pardonably disappointed.

"I thought she would have done it better," she remarked regretfully to her husband.

"I dare say she will, darling, when the night comes. I think she has the making of a good actress in her; and, if not, why she will be all the better foil for you, my pet."

If Lady Dora could have seen Winifred rehearsing alone in her room, she would not have had much fear of failure. When she uttered the passionate upbraidings, her eyes flashed with real scorn and indignation; and at the plaintive passages they would fill with quick, unbidden tears, and her voice tremble. At the Court rehearsals it was only by an effort that she concealed her emotion, and kept her voice even and tranquil. One day she had ridden over to the Court to rehearse with Lady Dora. Mr. Hastings

came in from a drive, and found his cousin alone in the morning-room.

"Pray, don't come in, Errol," she exclaimed; "I must not be interrupted, or Winifred will be ready first."

"Is Miss Eyre here, then?" he asked.

"Yes—in the picture-gallery, I think. She said she could study her part best there."

Mr. Hastings left the room, and turned his steps in the direction of the picture-gallery. It was an intensely hot afternoon, and all the doors were thrown wide open. He looked into the long, uncarpeted room, and there he saw a new picture in a new frame. He stood and gazed at it longer and with deeper feelings than he had ever gazed at any other picture there; it was the only one that was not his—it was the only one he cared for or desired ardently. Framed in the dark oak of the window-setting, was a lithe, graceful figure, half reclined, and a fair, upturned face. Some wandering rays of the warm sun strayed over the bright, rippling brown hair, and the large, beautiful eyes looked up, seeing nothing in the intensity of an afternoon reverie. Errol half feared to break the spell that he stood watching. Presently impatience overcame the fascination. He went toward her, and the noise of his footsteps aroused her.

"Were you studying or thinking, Miss Eyre?" he asked.

"I hardly know, Mr. Hastings. Thinking, perhaps."

"It is too warm to study, or to think, either. Have you ever seen the Hazell portrait-gallery?"

"Never."

"Should you like to see it?"

"I should indeed."

"Come with me and I will show it you. Wait a moment, though; I must get the key; I always keep that room locked; then when I want to shut myself in there, no one thinks it strange."

She waited, looking out of the window into the rose-garden. In a minute he returned. She followed him, and heard the echo as he turned the massive key in the lock. He stood aside a moment for her to pass, and then she heard the heavy door close behind them. A feeling half of fear crept into her heart. She dared not turn; a dim consciousness of what was passing in his mind seemed to

overshadow her. One by one she gazed at the portraits on the wall, at the beautiful, gracious-looking women, and the stalwart men, to some of whom the present Mr. Hastings bore such a striking likeness. She could not feel that pleasure in looking at them that she might have done at another time, for she was oppressed by the feeling that Errol was standing silent behind, watching her. Presently she dropped her eyes from the wall, and turned to him. She began a sentence, and then paused abruptly, blood-red with confusion at the intensity of his gaze. He put his hand on hers and essayed to draw her toward him, but she turned sharply away, trembling and frightened.

"My love! my darling!" he cried, in a deep, strong voice, "do not let us misunderstand each other any longer. You loved me once; you do love me still a little, I believe. Why should there be mistrust and constraint between us?"

His words were very sweet in her ears, but the false pride that had tormented her so long would not let her be happy even now, at the crisis of her life. She drew herself away.

"You have seen the wives that all the former Hastingses have chosen—some noble, all fair. I swear before Heaven none of them have been loved and revered as you shall be if you will be the wife of the last of the race! O my darling! do not let a false pride make all our lives one long bitterness. Yield yourself to my love, and love me with all your large, noble heart. Winifred, my darling!" and he would have taken her in his arms, but she recoiled.

Tears came into her eyes—large tears that gathered and brimmed over, running down the fair face, and making it sad.

"I loved you once," she half sobbed—"loved you with all my heart, as I could never love again. I was only a poor, little country girl then; you were a hero, and a god to me, something different from any one I had seen before; and because I was simple and ignorant, and—and loving, you despised me, and thought lightly of me; and you treated Miss Champion with honor and courtesy, because she was a fine lady, and—and you insulted me because—because you thought I was only a farmer's daughter!"

And Winifred sobbed with passionate indignation at the remembrance of her wrongs. Mr. Hastings was fairly angry. Her tears moved him to impatience.

"Will you never cease upbraiding me?" he exclaimed.

"Have I not atoned to you enough? Have I not humbled myself before you as I believe, in truth, none of our race ever humbled himself before? Can I offer you more than the devotion of my life? Again I tell you I love you with all my soul. I offer you an honorable name, and I promise you the gratification of your every wish as far as it lies in my power. Will you mar my life for your selfish pride? Will you sacrifice your own happiness to the most exacting, the least satisfying passion of the human heart? Once for all, Winifred, will you take the love I offer you, or do you reject me now and forever?"

He stood looking at her, deeply moved, longing, waiting to take her to his heart, and keep her there safe in his strong arms against the adverse winds and waves of life. Her heart echoed to his, her pulses throbbed in answer to his, and yet the demon pride mastered her. "This was the revenge you once desired!" it whispered, and she turned away with a gasping sob, crying:

"I reject you!"

He was gone even before the better impulse, surging quickly into her heart, moved her to call him back, crying:

"I did not mean it!"

She felt then she had thrown away her own life, her own happiness, and she crouched down by the window, uttering great, gasping sobs of remorse and anguish.

From that time Mr. Hastings' manner to her was changed. He was courteous, but in no wise different in his behavior to her than to the other ladies who visited at the Court. And when she thought he no longer cared for her, with all the inconsistency of her sex, her love for him revived tenfold, and she almost broke her heart for him. She was never scornful now; there was no bitter intonation in her voice, as there had been sometimes when she spoke to him, but her manner was gentle, beseeching, and pleading.

"Coquetry, then, is natural to women," Mr. Hastings said, angrily, to himself. "I thought this one at least had been free; she is not worth the devotion I have wasted on her. That she should resent the wrong I did her, passionately at first, was natural, was womanly—now her anger degenerates into pride and self-love."

A week before the theatricals, the Princess Zelikoff ar-

rived at the Court. Lady Dora was charmed to have her friend with her again.

"You *must* take part in the tableaux," she said to her. "You will be magnificent. I shall have Night and Morning, besides those already formed. You will make the most regal, majestic Night that ever was conceived."

Coming every day to rehearse with Lady Dora, Winifred saw, with the terrible instinct of jealousy, that the pale, beautiful, languid Frenchwoman loved the master of Hazell Court. She watched them narrowly, not seeming to see them, and yet painfully conscious of every word that passed between. She fancied, and perhaps it was not only fancy, that the old tenderness Mr. Hastings had shown for her was creeping into his manner to the Princess Zelikoff. He was always at her side now—when she rode, when she sung, or when she sat apart from the rest of the company. Sometimes Winifred, stung with jealousy, would try the power of her old fascinations upon him. She spoke to him in the low, soft voice he would have given half he possessed to hear in the time that was passed; she looked with pleading eyes into his face, and sung the songs he loved, and yet she could not keep him by her side. There was no bitterness, no want of courtesy in his manner to her; she would have found even that less painful; it seemed to her that he left her because he cared more for the society of the Princess Zelikoff. As the evening of the theatricals drew near, Winifred's private rehearsals grew more passionate, her public ones more calm.

"I never was so disappointed in any one!" Lady Dora exclaimed, with great vexation, to her husband; "she is as impassive in those scenes that might be made so much of as if she were only taking part in a commonplace conversation."

"Wait until the evening, Dora," answered quiet George Annesly, who was much more observant than people gave him credit for; "if she disappoints you then, I shall be very much surprised."

"You only say that because you have taken such a wonderful fancy to her, George."

"I like her immensely," Mr. Annesly acquiesced; "but it is not that which makes me believe she will act well when the time comes. My dear little Dora, I know you are very

clever and far-seeing, but you do not always observe everything. You think she does not care for your cousin."

"I am sure she does not, George."

"And I tell you, little woman, that she does care for him with all her heart, and that she is half mad with jealousy of Valerie de Zelikoff. There has been some quarrel, I am certain; when or what about, I don't even pretend to guess; and every time she acts with him, she has to use the greatest self-restraint to keep herself from breaking out into the passion which her *rôle* demands. But if she does not give vent to her real feelings, and astonish you all on Thursday—well, I shall be very much surprised."

His wife laughed skeptically.

"I bet you half a dozen pairs of gloves you are wrong, George."

"Done!" he answered, and the conversation dropped.

Miss Champion and Lady Laura Fordyce formed the meanest opinions of their cousin's dramatic powers.

"I can not conceive what made Lady Dora ask her to take a part," said Flora. "She must be dreadfully vexed now that she did. So rude, too, to pass over you and Ada."

"Of course you were the person, dear, who ought to have been asked first," rejoined Lady Laura.

"My acting would have been out of the question. I have been far too much occupied," returned Miss Champion; "besides, I should never care to take the second part, and of course Lady Dora has chosen the best for herself."

Winifred had come into the room during the latter part of the speech.

"I do not think Lady Dora has chosen the best part," she said; "I would rather play my own."

"Could you not throw a little more expression into your acting?" asked Flora, languidly; "it seemed so very tame and flat last night."

"I will try when the time comes," Winifred answered, with a defiant flash of her brown eyes.

"The Princess Zelikoff will hardly like you to play such an affectionate part with Mr. Hastings," said Flora, seeing her cousin's look and returning it.

"I scarcely see how it concerns the Princess Zelikoff," retorted Winifred, somewhat haughtily.

"Then you are less discerning than every one else, *ma belle*."

"You must be more explicit, if you please, Flora."

"Nay, dear, it is not necessary; I am persuaded you understand me," and Miss Champion turned away, humming a French *chansonnette*.

Winifred walked to the window, tears of mortification standing in her eyes. She would not for the world that her cousins should have seen them; but unfortunately, at that very moment, Reginald passed, and seeing the sad face of the only cousin he cared for, sprung in at the window, saying angrily:

"What have you girls been doing to Winifred? You are always tormenting her. Why can't you find some one else to vent your ill-temper upon?"

"I do not understand, Reginald," answered his sister, with an air of the most innocent surprise. "What do you mean?—tormenting Winifred? We are just speaking of Mr. Hastings and Princess Zelikoff. Surely that can not have hurt her feelings!"

Winifred could not bear any more; she stepped out of the window into the garden, where Reginald presently followed her.

"Oh, Reginald, I wish you would not interfere between us!" she exclaimed, reproachfully. "I know you mean it all in kindness, but you make them hate me."

"I seem always to be in the wrong," said Reginald, crossly. "I suppose I don't understand you women," and he turned on his heel and left her.

"How I wish I could go back to Endon Vale!" she sighed; "there is nothing but quarreling and misery for me here, and I have always been used to be loved and cared for."

Suddenly it came into her mind that she would walk over and look at her old home.

"I think I want a little bodily exercise to relieve my mind."

So she retraced her steps to the house, went to her room for her hat and mantilla, and left word with a servant that she had gone out. The afternoon was not too hot, for there was a fresh breeze; and she wandered along the shady lanes, occupied with her own thoughts, here and there

cutting across a field, or passing through the gates of farm-yards.

How familiar the way seemed to her!—there were no alterations, no new buildings, no trees cut down; it might have been but two weeks instead of two years since she wandered there last. Now and then she met a face she knew, and then she interrupted her reverie to stop and speak, and perhaps shake hands. She came up past the back of the farm, and then crossed over to the common in front. She did not want to attract any attention from its present inhabitants; only to look once more on the dear old house; so she sat down beneath the shade of a clump of trees, on one which had been felled. A vague kind of yearning made her eyes fill with tears—the feeling that comes into our hearts when we think of a time long ago, and it seems to us we were—ah! so much happier then. Yet she knew it was not so; if she could then have looked forward and seen the full realization of the dreams of those days, this would have seemed the happy time—that the one to be regretted. But reasoning seldom does much for the heartache; it is far pleasanter to gratify than to conquer it. She let all the old recollections surge up into her memory without trying to check them. A drowsy feeling came over her and made her shut her eyes. She saw in her fancy the figure of her father moving to and fro about the farm, and heard his clear voice calling to the men; she remembered how, ever since she was a child, she had been the little mistress of the house, and made his tea, and tried in her childish way to amuse him. Then, as she grew older, how fond, how proud he had been of her, how he had delighted in her accomplishments, and never wearied of hearing her sing and play. When she read French to him, she could call to mind how his kind face had lighted up with pleasure, although he did not understand a word, and then she condescendingly translated those pieces which she considered would be most interesting to him.

She did not understand then that his love and pride in her would have made a French grammar as interesting to him as the most exciting works of Balzac or Dumas. Then Winifred opened her eyes, and they rested on the dark clump of beeches where she had been used to sit and read her romances, and dream her young dreams. How keenly she remembered the time when Mr. Hastings had sat there

with her and whispered the first graceful flatteries her childish ears ever heard. Compliments, and gracious speeches, she had heard many since then, but none had been, or could ever be, so sweet, so dear to her as those first soft courtesies of a well-bred man. She remembered the painful contrast of Tom Fenner's rudeness, that, coming directly afterward to dispel so sweet a dream, had made her bitterly angry and harsh to him. She wondered what had become of him and of his old mother who had been so violent to her on the last occasion of their meeting.

"And that man loved me, too," she thought, "and I used to puzzle my brain with thinking how it was possible for the same sort of feeling to actuate a clown like him and a refined gentleman such as Mr. Hastings."

In the midst of her musings she suddenly remembered that it must be getting late. She looked at the little jeweled toy watch that had belonged to her mother, and found that it was nearly seven o'clock.

"And we dine at eight," she said to herself, rising hastily. "Sir Howard can not bear any one to be late."

But just as she had crossed the common she saw her old friend Hawkins, Mr. Hastings' gamekeeper, coming toward her, and an old feeling of kindly liking for the man made her stop. His face beamed with pleasure as he recognized her.

"Well, miss, I am right glad to see you again, that I am!" he exclaimed, speaking first, in the excess of his pleasure.

"Then you've not forgotten me, Hawkins?" Winifred said, with her sweetest, kindest smile.

"Forgot you, miss! no, that I haven't, nor never shall, I hope, so long as I lives. And so you be a-stayin' at the Manor, miss, with all the grand folks. I always said it was the place for a noble young lady like you."

"Yes, Hawkins, they've noticed me at last, you see," Winifred answered, not a bit hurt at the awkward compliment. "You and I did not think of these times when you let me into the little Court garden to see the great folks, did we? Why, I am actually going to take a part in the grand doings myself this time. Have you heard about it?"

"I know'd there was to be actings like a real theayter, miss, but I didn't hear your name mentioned. The housekeeper was so took up with talkin' about the furrin'

princess, as she says master takes so much 'count of, that she couldn't think of nothing else. But if so be as you're in the theayter, miss, why, I'll make shift to get a sight of it, that I will, somehow or other."

All the spirit was gone out of Winifred by the shaft so terribly random. But she answered kindly all the same:

"Do, Hawkins; I shall be glad to think you will be watching it. But how are you getting on yourself?"

"Rarely, and I thank you kindly, miss. I'm head-keeper now, and Mr. Hastings be a good master—a rare, thoughtful, kind-spoken gentleman."

"I'm very glad to hear you have got on so well; I am sure you deserve it. Good-bye, Hawkins; I must not stop another moment, or I shall keep dinner waiting."

And with a kindly nod and smile, she went on her way, leaving Hawkins standing and looking after her.

"God bless her!" he said. "I never saw a young lady like her before or since. I thought master was in love with her that time; more's the pity he's not. Why, that furrin' lady, with her pale face and black eyes, is no more to be thought of in the same day with Miss Winifred than—than—"

But Hawkins was unsuccessful in finding an appropriate simile.

CHAPTER XI.

CROSS-PURPOSES.

THE agitation and excitement of the last few days before the Court ball were almost too much for Winifred. She had no sleep at night; she could scarcely be induced to touch food, and Mrs. Champion really felt a little anxious at seeing her so hollow-eyed.

"You look as if you were suffering from the harrowing influences of a *grande passion*," Flora said to her.

"You must be able to sympathize with me just now, then," the girl retorted, quickly.

She was sorry the moment she had said it; she was not one of those who like to take a mean revenge for an offense.

Sir Clayton and Lady Grace Farquhar were to stay at the Court for the ball, and Winifred was to return to Endon Vale with them after Miss Champion's marriage.

Sir Clayton had been particularly anxious that she should look and act well. He had actually written to her himself on the subject, and inclosed a little treatise of his own on acting.

"I have underlined the passages which I think it most essential you should take notice of," he wrote. "Remember, above all things, to speak with great distinctness, and to pitch your voice in a *much* higher key than that in which you are in the habit of talking. You must bear in mind that you are not speaking to be heard only upon the stage by the people you are acting with, but you must aim at making yourself heard by every single member of the audience. Otherwise you fail of producing an effect. If people only see your gestures, and can not catch the words, their interest is completely marred. Nothing is more unpleasant than straining to hear something of which you can only now and then catch the sense. I wish you, my dear, to look your best, and, therefore, it is my particular desire that you spare no expense about your dress, or anything else that may make you appear to the greatest advantage."

When Lady Grace arrived at the Court on the day of the performance, she went over at once to Hurst Manor to see Winifred.

"My love!" she exclaimed, in great concern, "you have been doing too much—you look quite ghostly, and your eyes are twice their natural size."

"Oh, it is nothing, dear Lady Grace," Winifred answered, kissing her affectionately. "I am only a little anxious. To-morrow, when it is all over, I shall be quite myself again."

But even as she spoke, Lady Grace noticed that she trembled, and could scarcely keep still, and that she moved restlessly about from chair to sofa, and sofa to footstool. First she sat, then stood, then knelt, then half reclined, and finally paced up and down the room.

"This will not do, my child, really," exclaimed anxious Lady Grace. "You will be worn out before the evening, and then, if you look ill, and do not act your part well, Sir Clayton will be most terribly disappointed. Come, you must lie down for an hour or two. I shall pull down the blinds and sit with you so that you may not be disturbed."

Winifred consented unwillingly enough. Lady Grace darkened the room, and bathed her hot temples with eau-

de-Cologne, and tried to soothe her into sleep. But, as we all know by painful experience, the drowsy god is never so unwilling to be wooed as when he is most eagerly sought after, and Winifred, to whom an hour's quiet sleep would have been an incalculable blessing, tried in vain to compose herself. After awhile she gave up the attempt in despair.

"It is no use my lying here any longer," she said, wearily. "I feel more restless than ever."

"You must eat something now, dear," insisted Lady Grace. "If you are faint from want of food you will never be able to play, and your voice will be quite weak and indistinct."

Thus urged, Winifred tried hard to swallow a mouthful of the chicken which Lady Grace ordered for her, but in vain.

"I can not eat," she said at last, and paced up and down the room again. "How the time creeps! When will the evening come?"

Eight o'clock came at last, and the guests began to arrive at Hazell Court. It was bright daylight yet, but the theater had been darkened, the lights were burning, and the performance about to commence.

When Winifred stood for a moment behind the curtain to look, she saw before her an audience that might have made an accustomed actress pardonably nervous. Her heart did not sink at sight of the well-bred, superbly dressed throng, she only felt impatient to begin; but there were the tableaux to come first.

She heard a burst of rapturous applause as the curtain drew up and disclosed the first scene. Lady Dora had chosen her groups from Tennyson's "Idyls," and had thought fit to present the most striking one first, "The reading of Elaine's letter to Sir Lancelot of the Lake." Lady Ada Fordyce represented the dead lily Maid of Astolat, and very sweet and fair she looked, all robed in white, her golden hair unbound, and her hands holding the lily crossed upon her breast. Flora Champion made a stately, remorseful Guinevere, Mr. Hastings was Sir Lancelot, and Lord Lancing King Arthur. The scene was a very gorgeous one, and represented with great taste, and the applause was long and loud. Three times the curtain had to be raised. Then came other scenes, equally well chosen and represented, and lastly the tableau of Night and Morning. The

audience was entranced—nothing more beautiful could be conceived. The two figures were some distance apart. Night was turning to go, Morning just advancing. By some clever arrangement a kind of pale moonlight was shed over the dark form, whilst Morning seemed to bring in a burst of sunshine. The Princess Zelikoff, in the most graceful attitude, and veiled in black, looked the incarnation of sad, *spirituelle* beauty, whilst Lady Dora, in her clouds of diaphanous drapery, was as radiant and bright as a sun-beam. Again and again the curtain had to be raised; the tableau was so beautiful, it seemed to the charmed beholders like some lovely illusion.

At last the curtain dropped for the last time, and Lady Dora hurried off to dress for the play. She ran good-humoredly into the room where Winifred was, to see that she was properly dressed and looked well. The girl turned to the door, and Lady Dora absolutely started. She had not dreamed that Winifred could look so lovely. It was not the dress either, for her costume in the first act was very simple—a short flowered chintz skirt, pulled through the pocket-holes over a striped petticoat, a square-cut bodice, the hair drawn up high over the face, and tied with a blue ribbon. No, it was not the dress—it could hardly be the paint around her eyes, or on her cheeks, that gave her that look of sparkling brightness, that intensity of expression.

“Perhaps George was right, after all, and she will act better than I thought,” mused Lady Dora. “My dear, you are perfectly bewitching,” she said with a pleasant smile, and ran away to dress.

Winifred had to appear first on the stage. Sir Clayton stood at one of the wings.

“Now, my dear!” he exclaimed, when she appeared, “let me look at you. H’m! *very* good, very good *indeed*. Now mind you speak out, so that every one can hear you. I braved the most terrible draughts to come and give you a last caution, and now I am going to place myself as far as possible from the stage. Good-bye, remember.”

Winifred trembled and quivered in every limb and nerve; she saw nothing, only felt as if she was fainting from intense excitement.

“Courage!” whispered a kind voice in her ear, and Mr. Hastings stood beside her, holding a glass of wine. “Drink this, you are only a little nervous.”

She did mechanically as he told her.

"Thank you, Errol," she said softly. In her excitement she had called him by his Christian name for the first time. Looking down earnestly at her, he saw she was not aware of it.

"Remember," he said, kindly. "a great deal of the success of my entertainment depends on you."

"I will do my best," she answered, and at this moment she was called on the stage. For an instant, lights, audience, stage, all seemed to swim before her, but ere even the courteous applause which greeted her appearance, had died away, she recovered herself, and broke into her first speech in a clear, ringing voice. The plot of the piece ran in this wise: *Rosine Beranger* (Winifred) is an innocent, fresh young country girl of the better class, living with an old bachelor uncle and maiden aunt, the comic elements of the piece. The uncle, *M. Pierre Beranger*, is a great anti-quarian, and the aunt, *Mlle. Mathilde*, is the primmest, stiffest of old maids. When the piece opens *Rosine* is going through the woods on some charitable errand. Presently she breaks into a clear, light-hearted, thrilling song, in imitation of the birds overhead; then she sits down on a fallen tree, and deposits her basket on the ground. An evil face is seen watching her through the branches. As she commences another verse of her song, a villainous figure springs upon her from behind, pushes her from her seat, and seizes her basket. She screams, and in answer to her cries a very gallant, handsome young gentleman comes rushing to her rescue. The villain of course makes off, pursued by the new comer, who presently returns, after a vain search for the miscreant. The handsome young gentleman is *George de Vernet*, the squire of the village, whom *Rosine* has only seen once before, and has, to tell the truth, fallen romantically in love with (Mr. Hastings played *De Vernet* with great effect). *De Vernet* falls straightway in love with *Rosine*, who is completely fascinated by his grace and gentle manners, and drinks in his dainty compliments and love speeches with charming eagerness.

It was here Winifred made her first impression. The expression in her face of trust, of wonder, of a happiness she could scarcely believe, was wonderful. Her head was slightly bent forward, her eyes now raised eagerly to his

face, now turned bashfully away. As she uttered the words, "You are not jesting, sir? you would not deceive me, because I am only a simple country girl?" her voice faltered and trembled, and she looked in his face with wistful earnestness. There was a burst of stifled applause; her acting was nature itself.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Mr. Annesly, "I thought she would surprise us, but I never dreamed of this."

Then follows a little more love-making, and a laughable scene between the old uncle and aunt. Toward the end of the first act *Rosine* receives a note from a fashionable cousin in Paris, saying she intends paying them a visit as soon as the gay season is over.

The second act commences with her arrival, greatly to *Rosine's* delight. *Blanche de Vaucours* (Lady Dora) trips in with the daintiest, most mincing of affected manners, dressed in the very height of fashion, with powdered hair and hoop. *Rosine* thinks her the loveliest creature she has ever beheld.

Blanche makes fun of everything in the simple country-house, laughs to scorn *Rosine's* rustic dress and manners, and flirts and minces up and down in the most bewitching way possible. Presently *George de Vernet* comes in and is introduced by *Rosine*, with some fear and pride, to the lovely cousin from Paris. *Blanche* is delighted with his handsome face and graceful manners, and not knowing of his relations with *Rosine*, immediately proposes to herself to make her sojourn in the old country-house more agreeable by a flirtation with him. *Rosine* sees her cousin's intentions, but does not tell her that *De Vernet* was her own lover, thinking in her heart that this will be a good test of the sincerity of his affection.

At first *George* is resolute in his allegiance. *Blanche* becomes piqued, uses her utmost powers of fascination upon him. He wavers, and finally falls desperately in love with the Paris beauty.

The excitement which Winifred had felt at first was gone, and in its place there was a real intense earnestness that made her feel every word she spoke. Perhaps she might not have been influenced in the same way had she been acting with any other man; but when she saw Errol Hastings' attention gradually wavering and being diverted from herself,

it seemed to put an earnestness, a passion into her acting that was akin to reality.

As *Rosine* watches them silently, her bosom heaves, the impatient tears of jealousy gather in her brown eyes; and when from the window she sees *De Vernet* kiss her cousin's hand she presses her hand quickly to her heart, and crying in an anguished voice, "He loves her!" sinks sobbing on the ground.

The sobs were so natural they startled the audience. At first there was a dead silence, but when they suddenly remembered that it was only a play, they broke into long, loud plaudits.

"I never was so surprised in my life, Errol," whispered Lady Dora aside. "Were you?"

"I am not surprised," he answered, gravely. "I think Miss Eyre could do anything she tried."

Rosine resolves to imitate her cousin—to dress grandly, and to be affected and disdainful. She appears presently in a hoop, a flowered silk dress, with her hair powdered, and a dainty little shepherdess hat.

When Winifred reappeared on the stage in her new costume, fanning herself, and assuming the prettiest airs imaginable, every one who knew her was perfectly astonished. She looked lovely, and her little coquettish airs were even more bewitching than pretty Lady Dora's. Sir Clayton was in raptures.

"Bravo, bravissimo!" he exclaimed; "it is perfect. The girl is a perfect actress!"

He was even more delighted when, on a sudden, breaking off from her affected gayety, she turned a sudden look of anguished jealousy on *De Vernet*. Miss Champion and Lady Laura Fordyce could ill conceal their vexation. They could only whisper a sharp comment on their cousin's intense artfulness in concealing her real powers.

Presently a young Paris exquisite, the *Count de Beaulieu* (Captain le Marchant), appears on the scene. He finds *Rosine* alone, and can scarcely credit that she is the country cousin of whom he has heard the fair *Blanche* (his lady love) speak slightly. He begins to pay *Rosine* the most extravagant compliments, and she receives them as a perfect matter of course, and as though she had been in the habit of receiving them all her life. The *Count de Beaulieu* becomes furiously *épris*, and at this juncture *De Vernet* and

Blanche come in from the garden. Both evince a decided chagrin at the turn affairs have taken. *Blanche* has no mind to lose so distinguished a lover as *M. de Beaulieu*, and *De Vernet* can not at all realize seeing *Rosine* made love to by another man.

With a quick glance *Rosine* comprehends the feelings of both, and resolves to take her revenge. She carries on a desperate flirtation with the count, whose attention she succeeds in engrossing in spite of *Blanche's* efforts to win him back. *De Vernet* forgets his new attachment, and follows *Rosine* everywhere with his eyes, suffering the same jealous torments that he so lately caused her. She treats him with scorn and disdain, and will scarcely condescend to look at him; but at times, when his face is averted, she looks after him with a yearning tenderness that gives the audience to understand that her real feelings for him are unchanged.

After a time, *George de Vernet* can bear it no longer, and picks a quarrel with *De Beaulieu*. They draw their swords and commence to fight. This made a capital point in the piece, for Mr. Hastings and Captain le Marchant were both expert swordsmen, so that the duel was not the usual stage-fight done to music, but a very pretty piece of sword-play, which called forth rapturous applause from the male portion of the audience. It lasted some little time without either receiving a thrust, when *Rosine* and *Blanche* run in upon the scene, and throw themselves between the combatants—*Rosine* on *De Vernet*, and *Blanche* on the count. This incident gives *De Vernet* the happy idea that *Rosine* still cares for him. He makes a passionate declaration of his love for her; she rejects him with scorn.

"I should think Mr. Hastings must really have offended Winifred," said Lady Laura to Miss Champion; "that indignation is done too well to be all feigned."

Then the count proposes to *Rosine*, and she accepts him for some unexplained reason, although she does not care for him. *De Beaulieu* is of course enchanted, and *George de Vernet* proportionately miserable. The last act commences by *Rosine* and *George* meeting alone in the woods. He reproaches her bitterly with her fickleness and infidelity.

"You loved me once," he exclaims.

"Yes," she answers, "when you were worthy of my love, or rather when I thought you worthy. You made me love

you, and then you tired of my simple country ways; they wearied you, and the finery, the gay airs of Paris, seemed to you far more than my true, simple love. *Blanche* engrossed all your thoughts; you forgot me until I aped my cousin's grand dress and airs, and you found the gay Paris butterfly wooing me. But why should I hide the truth? Fool that I am, I love you still—as much, nay, more than ever. But I have promised to be his wife. I am more honorable than you; I will keep my promise!”

And she turns away, followed by *De Vernet*.

When they are gone, the count, who has been in ambush, listening, comes forward in a towering passion. He declares he will marry no woman who does not love him; nay, more, who loves another man. *Blanche* coming in at the moment, he swears eternal love to her, and declares that it was only in a moment of pique that he pretended to fall in love with *Rosine*. She forgives him very gracefully, and they go off happily in the opposite direction. Then *De Vernet* and *Rosine* reappear, still quarreling.

“You are heartless!” he cries; “if you cared for me your love would master your pride.”

Mr. Hastings seemed to have caught Winifred's passionate earnestness as he pronounced the last words. She trembled exceedingly as she fixed her brown eyes on his face.

“You did the wrong. Are you just in reproaching me because I can not forget?”

“A true-hearted woman would both forget and forgive.”

“Never!” cries *Rosine*, passionately, turning away.

“Then farewell, *Rosine*—forever!”

“Farewell!” she answers; and when he is gone, sinks down sobbing on a bench. At this moment a messenger brings her a note.

“From the Count de Beaulieu, mademoiselle,” and *Rosine* breaks the seal.

“Lovely and esteemed *Rosine*,” it runs, “some little time ago I chanced to overhear a conversation between you and M. de Vernet. It became evident to me that you love him as much as you are indifferent to me; and pardon me if I say the mere toleration of a woman is not sufficient requital of my affection. I therefore beg to release you from your engagement, and have offered my hand to your cousin, who, I have good reason to know, loves me. With every expres-

sion of esteem and admiration, fair Rosine, your devoted servant, Etienne de Beaulieu."

Rosine is astonished, but in no wise disappointed. She has already half relented to *George*, and was only wanting an opportunity to break the engagement with the count. Suddenly a fear occurs to her that he may really have carried his threat of leaving her into execution. She rushes to the house; he is not there; a servant has seen him riding away toward the town. She orders a horse to be saddled, and sends a messenger flying after him. Some time elapses; he does not come. At last she hears horses' hoofs, and presently *De Vernet*, proud and sullen, enters the room.

"You sent for me, mademoiselle?" he says, sternly.

"Yes, *George*; see!" and she shows him the count's note. He returns it to her after having read it.

"*Après?*" he says, coldly.

"*Après, George?*" cries *Rosine*, with tears in her eyes—"I am free."

"I see it from this note, mademoiselle."

"Then you no longer care for me, *George?*" she asks, in despairing accents.

"You mistake, mademoiselle; but half an hour ago I declared for you my passionate, unalterable love. You rejected it with scorn."

"I do not reject it now, *George*."

"How can I tell, mademoiselle? I do not understand your caprice; you may change again."

"I will not change; I have never changed, *George*. I ask for your love; do you refuse me?" and *Winifred* looked up into *Errol's* eyes with an intense earnestness that almost made him forget they were only acting.

"My own at last!" cries *De Vernet*, passionately; "no more cross purposes."

Enter the count and *Blanche*, *M. Beranger*, and *Mlle. Mathilde*; *tableau*, and the curtain falls.

The audience was enraptured; thunders of applause rolled round the great room; the curtain had to be drawn up three times, and all the actors were recalled. It would have been an ill compliment to *Lady Dora* to have made too much of *Miss Eyre*, but every one was talking of her. When *Mr. Hastings* took *Winifred's* hand to lead her forward, he felt it tremble violently.

"You acted wonderfully," he whispered. "I almost forgot you were acting at last."

"I almost forgot it myself," she answered, sighing; and then he led her into the ball-room, where she received compliments enough to have turned the heads of half a dozen women.

"How pleased poor papa would have been!" she thought, with a sigh.

CHAPTER XII.

A BRILLIANT MATCH.

EVERY one was charmed with the entertainment. It had not been too long. The tableaux were lovely, and as for the play, "Cross-purposes," it was charming. Not very much plot in it, perhaps, but so wonderfully acted. It was so rare to see gentlemen and ladies play thoroughly well; and they had all been so handsome, so graceful. Except the old uncle and aunt—yes, of course; but then they were exquisitely droll.

Miss Champion and Lady Laura may have suffered some pangs of jealousy at the admiration Miss Eyre excited, but the Princess Zelikoff was in a torment of jealous pain. She, the unsusceptible, the pale, impassable Diana, as she had been called, was at last in love with Mr. Hastings. She did not know if he cared for her; nay, when she saw his passionate look at Winifred at the end of the play, a terrible fear seized her that his affections were centered on the graceful English girl. She must love him, too; the most finished actress could not have thrown such expression into her eyes, had not some deep emotion been working in her heart.

The spirit of the play yet lingered in Winifred's mind—a kind of impulse seized her that she would confess to Mr. Hastings that she repented of her stubborn pride, and tell him she had never ceased to love him. Her heart beat violently when he came up to her and asked her kindly if she was tired.

"Mr. Hastings," she said, blushing vividly, and looking up eagerly in his face, "may I ask a favor of you?"

"Anything in the world," he replied, courteously.

"Will you dance the first dance with me to-night?"

"I am very sorry," he said hesitating. "I wish you had asked anything else; but—but the truth is, I am—the Princess Zelikoff—"

"I beg your pardon. Of course I understand," she answered, quickly, deeply mortified, and, turning, she took Reginald Champion's arm, who stood near, and walked away to the drawing-room, where the dancing was to take place. It was all over then; there was no more hope; she had lost him forever. Well, it was her own fault, her own folly. All the gentlemen were crowding round her, and praying her to dance, and she chose her partners and filled up her card for every dance. When Mr. Hastings came to her she laughed lightly, and showed him her programme.

"I should have been very glad to dance with you, but unfortunately, you see, my card is full."

He turned away, frowning.

"She is only a thorough-paced coquette, after all," he muttered. And he went over to the Princess Zelikoff, who smiled on him with kind eyes, and Winifred noted the glance with a sharp, jealous pang.

Flora Champion was dancing with Lord Lancing.

"This is the last time we shall meet, Evelyn," she said, as they stopped from the waltz.

"The last time? Nay, I hope not."

"The last time before my marriage. We shall be dead to each other after that."

"Do you mean to cut all your old friends, then, Miss Champion?"

"Won't you call me Flora, Evelyn, just for this last time?"

"Yes, Flora; but why do you mean that we are not to meet any more?"

"You will not understand me," she cried, impatiently.

"When I am married to Mr. Maxwell, all will be changed between us."

"I shall never change to you."

"You have changed," she said, bitterly. "If you had not changed, I should not now be on the brink of a marriage that I loathe."

"Flora!" said Lord Lancing, in a kind, grave voice, "I do not think you have any right to reproach me. I loved you very dearly in the old days."

"Why can not you love me now?" she said, as if the

words forced themselves from her lips. Her eyes were bent on the ground.

"You forbade me to love you, Flora; you slighted me, and showed yourself weary of me. I forgave you all that; I thought a passing caprice had for the moment made you indifferent to me, and that you would come to care for me again. Do you remember that evening in the conservatory at Endon Vale? You turned your back on me; you treated me with such scorn as no man who has any self-respect, however much he may love a woman, can forget; you ignored all that had ever passed between us. You said you had never loved me—that you never should."

"Oh, Evelyn! I did not mean it."

"You meant it when you said it, Flora, in all sincerity. It half broke my heart. Do you think that any man with a spark of manliness would go sighing about after a woman who showed him plainly that his presence was distasteful to her?"

"I do not wonder, Evelyn, that you grew to hate me," Miss Champion said, gently.

"Nay, Flora, you do me wrong," he cried, warmly. "To hate you because you wounded my love, would have been but to be guilty of a pitiful egotism. I have never ceased to care for you as if you were a dear sister, but I could never love you for a wife again."

"Never, Evelyn?" she asked, appealingly, turning her blue eyes (not cold now) upon him.

"Never, Flora," he answered, very sadly.

A hand of ice seemed clutching at her heart. This humiliation had been all to no purpose. A vague kind of hope had come to her that when Lord Lancing saw her on the brink of marriage with another man, his old love would return, and he would save her from a fate she had begun to dread. The *éclandre* of breaking off her engagement with Mr. Maxwell within five days of their proposed marriage seemed as nothing to her compared with the greater horror of fulfilling it. She had strung herself up to this great venture, the greatest trial to the pride or modesty of a woman, offering herself to the man she loved, and in vain. What she suffered was terrible. Lord Lancing saw it, and felt almost as keenly. Some men would have despised her for what she had done; he was far too generous.

"Flora," he whispered, in a voice full of kindness and

tenderness, "let me still and always be your nearest friend. If I can ever serve you or save you a pain or a difficulty, I shall think no trouble too great, no sacrifice too costly. Will you always remember that in the days to come, Flora?"

He dwelt on her name as though it were one he had once loved to utter.

"Thank you, Lord Lancing," she said, mechanically, "I will remember."

Mrs. Champion had decided that the wedding was to be a grand one, as grand as possible in a country place. There could be no pretense of its being a love-match, therefore, everything should be done with magnificence and ostentation. In this view Sir Howard fully concurred. Mr. Champion was so disgusted with the whole affair, that his wife knew it was fruitless to consult him. It was only after an angry remonstrance from his father that he consented to give Flora away. Hurst Manor was full of guests. Besides the eight bride-maids, who were all staying in the house, there were Mr. Maxwell's sister and her husband, Lady Valanton, and several of Mrs. Champion's near relations and connections.

The whole party from Hazell Court were invited to the wedding, and all the families of note for some distance around. There was to be a grand ball in the evening after the departure of the bride and bridegroom.

If Flora Champion felt a horror and disgust at the thought of her marriage with Mr. Maxwell, no one but Lord Lancing was aware of it. She moved about in her usual stately manner, only smiling perhaps a little more than was her wont. Riding in the lanes two days before her marriage, she met Lord Lancing.

"May I ask a last favor of you, Lord Lancing?" she whispered.

"You know you may," he answered.

"Do not come on Tuesday."

He bowed gravely. The day before the wedding he received a telegram summoning him to the north of England.

"Pray do not go, Evelyn!" exclaimed his sister; "every one will say it is because you were in love with Flora."

"I hope they will," he answered, quietly.

And every one did say so; and when Flora knew it she was glad secretly in her heart. The wedding morning

rose as fair as ever shone on the gladdest, happiest bride. If fair weather were an indication of a fortunate married life, Flora's sky in the future should have been unclouded. She was dressed and alone when a low tap came at her door, and Winifred entered.

"Flora, dear," she said, sweetly, "we have not been the best of friends. I should like to feel we had one kind, cordial thought of each other before we part. Will you kiss me?"

Miss Champion's lip trembled for a moment, then she stood up, cold, grand, impassive. "I think I understand you," she said scornfully. "You feel sorry for me; your pity for the terrible fate I am bringing upon myself overcomes even your enmity. No! I do not like you. I will not kiss you!"

Winifred left the room without another word. Few people have seen a more magnificent bride than Miss Champion as she walked proudly up the aisle, her hand resting, not leaning, on her father's arm. I think there was scarcely a man in the church who did not feel a pang of remorse at seeing so much loveliness bestowed on so insignificant a husband. The rich white satin fell in gleaming folds around her; on her neck and arms shimmered costly diamonds—the bridal present of Mr. Maxwell. She uttered every response clearly, never once faltering or bending her proud head; a more composed bride was never seen. At the breakfast she spoke and acted with a grace and ease that were charming; every one might have believed that she had married the man of her heart. Mr. Maxwell was silently happy, and behaved like a gentleman; at least, giving none of the family cause to feel ashamed of Flora's choice. Some people were under the impression that she was extremely fortunate in having secured so rich, so unexceptionable a husband. As the fashionable papers subsequently chronicled, the wedding-presents were numerous and magnificent, chiefly jewelry. Sir Howard gave his granddaughter a tiara and necklace of diamonds; Mr. Champion a diamond brooch and ear-rings; Mrs. Champion a diamond bracelet; Mr. Maxwell a necklace, bracelets, and ear-rings of brilliants; and all the other relatives, connections, and friends made presents of rings, bracelets, brooches, and ear-rings, set with every known gem. Mr. Hastings' present was both beautiful and costly. A mag-

nificent ran, gold-handled, and set with precious stones. Each of the bride-maids received from Mr. Maxwell a gold locket with the bride's monogram set in diamonds.

It was a relief to every one when the breakfast was over, and the bridal pair had started on their journey. As she drove off in the barouche, drawn by four magnificent bay horses, Flora Maxwell looked like a queen. Perhaps she felt like one as she bowed right and left to the crowd of country people who stood on either side of the Manor gates to see her pass.

Mr. Hastings and Winifred danced together at the ball in the evening; but there was an unpleasant kind of stiffness and reserve between them; she fancied he wished to avoid her; he thought the same of her, and danced more than usual with the Princess Zelikoff.

"How glad I shall be to get away from this!" poor Winifred said to herself, with exceeding bitterness. "I think I should die if I were forced to stop and see him love another woman. Perhaps when I am back at Endon Vale I shall forget him."

She was delighted when the day came for her to leave Hurst Manor. Her only regret was in parting with her grandfather, who had been very kind to her, and to whom she had really become attached. The evening before her departure he called her to him in the library.

"My dear," he said, taking her hand affectionately, "I have become very fond of you in the last few weeks, and I can not bear the thought of your leaving me. If you will come and live with me, I will give you every advantage that your cousin Flora enjoyed, and more besides; for she never studied me as you have done. If you marry, I will make your marriage portion equal to hers."

Winifred felt very much inclined to cry.

"You are very good and generous to me," she answered, "but it is impossible for me to do as you wish. Lady Grace has been a mother to me; we love each other dearly; and after all her and Sir Clayton's kindness I could not leave them as long as I thought they cared to have me with them."

"Perhaps you are right," Sir Howard remarked, gravely; "I have no wish that you should requite kindness by ingratitude. However, my dear, you must come and see

me often. It will be pleasanter for you now that Flora is gone."

Lady Grace was expecting a party of guests at Endon Vale, and invited Lady Ada Fordyce to accompany Winifred home, as Lady Valanton and her eldest daughter were going to visit in the north.

Mme. de Montolieu was rejoiced at seeing her dear child once more.

"It seems years that you have been away!" she exclaimed, kissing her fondly; "but now I trust you have come back to your old madame to stay a long time. You must have so much to tell me from all these months."

All the household were glad to have her amongst them again; and as for Sir Clayton, he had such long arrears of copying and references for her to make up, that Lady Grace was obliged to interfere and rescue her from her musty labor, or he would scarcely have allowed her time to eat.

Lord Harold, who was at the house again, complained bitterly of her frequent and prolonged absence; but after a time he grew more tolerant, and seemed to find some consolation in the company of Lady Ada Fordyce. He was still very much in love with Winifred, but he began now to reflect sagely that it was folly for him to be pining and sighing after her if she had really made up her mind that she would not marry him.

He did not like to ask her again after she had twice so positively refused him; but her manner to him was so kind and sweet that he could not altogether feel sure that his case was hopeless. He resolved on speaking to his aunt.

"I want to speak to you, aunt," he said one morning, following Lady Grace into the green-house. "You don't mind my cigar, I know, and it will do the plants good."

This was an attempt to put himself at his ease; but somehow, when he began his conversation, the cigar went out, and dropped from his fingers on to the ground.

"Yes, Harold," said Lady Grace, sitting down on one of the flower-stands. "What is it?"

"About Winifred," he exclaimed, dashing all at once into his subject. "You know, aunt, I proposed to her here two years ago?"

"Yes, Harold."

"Well, I don't think you know that I asked her again after that, at her own home?"

"No, dear."

"I did; and more than that, if I thought there was the least chance of her accepting me, I would ask her again now; and I want to know, aunt, if you think there is?"

Lady Grace paused for a moment.

"I scarcely think there is," she said, presently; "but I am hardly justified in giving an opinion. She is a dear, lovable girl, there is no one I should better like to see your wife, Harold."

"I do not like to ask her again, aunt, if she does not care for me, it might make her feel awkward and uncomfortable, and seem as if I were persecuting her. Could you not—could you not find out for me, aunt?"

"Perhaps I could, dear. Do you wish me to try?"

"I should be so glad if you would, and—don't mind telling me if the answer is—is not favorable."

The same evening before dinner, Winifred had occasion to ask Lady Grace some question, and went to her room to look for her.

"Come in, dear!" cried her ladyship; "I wanted to see you." She began to take some jewels from her dressing-case, keeping her face averted from the girl.

"I am going to ask you a plain, straightforward question, my love; you will, I know, answer me in the same manner. Is it possible for you, do you think, ever to entertain a warmer feeling for Harold than that of friendship? Could you love him enough to be his wife?"

"I could never love him other than as a sister," faltered Winifred.

"Very well, my love; we will never mention the subject again. Try and forget that I ever asked you."

Lady Grace waited that evening until all the ladies had retired, then she called Lord Harold to her.

"I have done as you wished, dear," she said, kissing him; "I wish I had another answer to bring you."

"It is against me, then? I scarcely hoped it would be otherwise. Thank you, dear auntie. Good-night," and he hurried away without another word.

One morning Lady Grace received a letter from Lady Marion Alton, containing the following passage:

"I have had a very urgent letter from Fee, begging me

to go to her. Mr. Clayton has treated her in the most insulting, heartless manner, and has now left her and gone, no one knows whither. She seems almost heart-broken. I dare not at present leave my mother, whose life hangs by a thread. Will you in charity go to my poor child, and try to comfort her? She used to be very fond of Miss Eyre; perhaps you might succeed in inducing her to accompany you back to Endon Vale. I know I may tax your friendship so far as to make this request."

Lady Grace went to Mrs. Clayton the day following, and took Winifred with her. Fee was looking thoroughly ill and wretched; her nerves were so unstrung, that when she saw them she burst into a flood of tears. When Lady Grace pressed her to return with them to Endon Vale, she declined.

"I am not equal to it," she said. "I can not bear to see strangers."

Then Winifred stooped down over her, and kissed and soothed her, and Lady Grace promised that she should see no one unless she liked; that she should have her own rooms, and keep to them entirely if she pleased. And at last a smile came out on the poor, wan cheeks, and she consented to go with them. It was astonishing the change that a few days of kind and affectionate consideration worked in her. She began to enter and enjoy the society in the house; she sent for her old favorite, Cheveux Dore, and even tried to resume her former sprightliness. Now and then the tears would gather in her eyes, and a heavy-drawn sigh escape her as she thought:

"In these lanes we rode together—here we used to dance—there he would watch me when I sung. Ah! what might have been! and now all hope is gone."

From every one she received the utmost kindness and consideration, not as though it were called forth by pity, but with a kindly good breeding that made it seem only the just tribute to her beauty and position. Mr. Hastings came sometimes to see her, and she liked his society better than that of any one else.

"Is it true that you are going to marry the Princess Zelikoff?" she said to him one day.

"I have no reason to imagine that the Princess Zelikoff would accept me if I asked her," he answered.

Mrs. Clayton repeated this to Winifred.

"How can you let him marry that Frenchwoman?" she said, almost with impatience. "I know he did love you, and you must have been mad to treat him as you did. What can you possibly want? You will never meet another man who combines in himself every quality that women love and admire as he does."

"Don't say any more, Fee! I know it."

And Winifred burst into such a violent storm of tears that Mrs. Clayton was actually alarmed.

CHAPTER XIII.

"IT IS TOO LATE."

"I AM weary to death of this humdrum life," exclaimed Mr. Hastings to Captain le Marchant, as they strolled through the Hazell woods, smoking their morning cigars.

"What a restless fellow you are, Errol!" returned his friend. "Nothing seems to content you long now. What in the world ails you? I never knew you have these strange fits before."

"I can not endure monotony," remarked Mr. Hastings.

"Monotony! *Bon Dieu*, what would you have? With one of the prettiest places in England, a stable full of blood horses, and last, not least, a beautiful woman dying in love for you, and not content! My dear Errol, any one of the three would insure my happiness, for three months at least."

"Arthur," said Mr. Hastings, stopping suddenly, and laying his hand on his friend's shoulder, "I may as well tell you the truth, I know you too well to be afraid of your betraying my confidence. You will think it hardly a proof of the predominant characteristic which our family have always prided themselves upon, when I tell you that I am eating my heart out about a woman who has refused me."

"You, Errol!" exclaimed Captain le Marchant, in unfeigned surprise. "You whom I have always thought the most indifferent fellow in the world to women! Who the devil is it, then?"

"Miss Eyre."

"Miss Eyre!" and the two men stood looking at each other. "I should have thought of any one sooner than

her. You always seemed to me to be rather antagonistic to each other. But you have not known her very long?"

"More than two years."

"What! before you left England the last time?"

"It was on her account that I left England."

"Enigma upon enigma, Errol. May one ask any further questions?"

"There is nothing more to tell," Mr. Hastings answered, quickly. "I asked her to be my wife then, and she refused. I asked her a few weeks ago, and she refused me again."

"What the devil does the girl want then?" asked Le Marchant, angry for his friend. "Is she waiting for a duke to ask her?"

"Don't let us say any more about it," cried Mr. Hastings, with sudden impatience. "I wish to Heaven I had kept to my original plan of going to Norway! I can not stop in this place any longer. When Dora makes up her mind to go I shall be off somewhere. Do you feel inclined for a cruise, Arthur?"

"Yes, perfectly; the sea-air will brace up my delicate nerves, and set me going for the winter. What a pity you don't suffer from the *mal-de-mer*, Errol! There is no better cure for love-sickness than sea-sickness."

They were approaching the house, and Lady Dora came tripping out to meet them.

"I want to speak to you, Errol, privately," and she nodded significantly to Captain le Marchant, who went off in the opposite direction. "My dear Errol," she said, putting her hand gently on her cousin's arm, and looking up in his face, "you must think you are never going to get rid of us."

"My dear Dora," began Errol; but the little lady interrupted him.

"Of course you wouldn't be such a bear as to admit it, but George declares we are boring you to death. Besides, there are three houses to which I am engaged for a fortnight's visit, and I hardly know where to go first. Perhaps you are not aware of it, Errol," she added, archly, "but I have had a particular object in remaining so long."

"Have you, Dora? What is it?"

"George says I am an inveterate match-maker, and that

my scheming does more harm than good; but I did think, Errol—may I say it?"

"Yes, Dora."

"I did think that you might come to care for Valerie. She is so gentle, so charming, so rich, of such good family."

"*Après?*"

"*Après?*" laughed Lady Dora; "surely nothing can be wanted after all that."

"It is requisite that I should care for her, is it not?"

"Certainly; but how is it possible that there should be any difficulty in loving such a charming creature?"

"Now, my dear little cousin, banish all these thoughts from your pretty head. I may as well take you into my confidence at once. I have considered the matter well, I have tried to be in love with your friend and failed. I find her charming, feminine, clever, and beautiful, but she does not inspire me with the remotest sentiment either of love or passion. And, besides, why should I marry?"

"To perpetuate the noble race of Hastings, *beau signeur*," laughed his cousin.

"I don't know, Dora, but I fancy it is rather grand to be the last of a race," he answered, laughing.

"Then all my plans are at an end, Errol, and I may as well take my departure."

"That is as your own sweet will dictates. I am only too glad to have you as my guest as long as you feel inclined to make Hazell Court your home."

But within three days Lady Dora took her departure, accompanied by the Princess Zelikoff.

Mr. Hastings bade them a very kind, courteous farewell, and Valerie de Zelikoff left the Court with bitter disappointment gnawing at her heart.

"So many have loved me, worshiped me passionately," she said, bitterly, to herself; "would have given fame, fortune, life itself for my love, and the only man who ever woke a passion in my breast is indifferent to me. Ah! how cold these brave, handsome Englishmen are! and how blind!"

And yet it might have been the true courtesy that springs from a generous heart, the feigned ignorance of a passion he could not return.

"And now, Arthur!" exclaimed Mr. Hastings, with an air of relief when his guests had departed, "we will be off

on our three weeks' cruise. I want to be back by the middle of September for the shooting; and I mean to ask a lot of fellows to come down and stay. Hawkins tells me there will be wonderful sport. I have promised to pick up Ashburton somewhere on the Mediterranean coast."

"That's right, he's a capital good fellow; and three are better company than two when they are all the same sex. Not that you or I are likely to quarrel, old fellow; we have tried the experiment of being alone together rather too often for that. I remember once, though, we had a difference, when I got into such an infernal rage because that pretty little Italian would make eyes at you, when I was anxious to secure the whole of her attention."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, let us keep out of the way of women," said Errol, wearily. "I believe they are the root of every quarrel, every misery, every wretchedness in the world."

"Don't be ungrateful, Errol. It is only fair that they should make us miserable sometimes, when they give so much happiness at others. Why, you are the last fellow in the world I ever expected to hear rail against the fair sex. I am sure they have always been fond enough of you."

"Tush!" said Mr. Hastings, impatiently, and went off to write his letters.

There was not time for him to ride over to Endon Vale before he left the Court, and it had always been more pain than pleasure to him of late to see Winifred.

Some one gave out the intelligence at dinner at Endon Vale that Mr. Hastings had gone on a yachting expedition, and that Lady Dora and the Russian princess accompanied him. Mrs. Clayton looked from underneath her lashes at Winifred, and noted the sudden sickly whiteness which came into her face. "Ah! how I wish I could help her!" she thought, pitifully. "A real friend might often be able to save a girl years of unhappiness and regret. If she would only tell me!"

Lady Grace had devoted a pretty, bay-windowed sitting-room to Mrs. Clayton's use, and there she and Winifred often sat for hours together undisturbed. They were very fond of each other, very sympathetic and caressing, yet neither mentioned the subject that was nearest her heart.

At last Mrs. Clayton resolved to dissipate the reserve.

She knew that to gain confidence you must be prepared to give it, and strengthened herself to the task.

They were sitting together as usual, one each side of the window, sometimes speaking, oftener silent. The day had been sultry, and the windows were thrown wide open to let in the little air that was stirring. A drowsy hum of voices, and the sound of mallets striking the balls came from the croquet-ground, and now and then a laugh or an exclamation was carried to their indifferent ears. An open book lay on Winifred's lap. She was not reading, but leaning back in the luxurious chair, and gazing dreamily into the distance with eyes that looked on the ideal rather than the real picture.

Mrs. Clayton had been watching her for some time. At last she spoke:

"My dear Winifred, you will go on reading and dreaming about CEnone until you have completely identified yourself with that forlorn maiden."

Winifred turned her eyes dreamily to the speaker. "I was not even thinking of CEnone;" and then her hand closed the book which had been open at her favorite poem.

"Confess, now—you are jealous of the attention Lord Harold pays your cousin?"

Winifred laughed gayly.

"O, Fee, you are a bad diviner of secrets. I am waiting in daily hope that he will propose to her. I could not fancy two people better suited."

"I could."

"Who, Fee?"

"Yourself and Errol Hastings."

"O, Fee!" cried Winifred, with impatient pain, "why do you speak of him? You know all is over between us!"

"I should like to speak just this once, dear; and if you will hear me, I will be silent in future. I know that Errol loved you very dearly; I can not but believe you cared for him. Think, dear, how my life has been marred. I chose one man, loving another. God help me, I love that other still," and a low sob escaped her. "You can not even guess, Winifred, what a terrible thing it is to feel conscious of an error when it is too late to repair it. It is not too late for you yet. If there has been any quarrel, any misunderstanding between you, surely it can be set right by a little forbearance on the part of one or the other! Do not

let some foolish trifle, some false pride, mar the happiness of all your life!"

Mrs. Clayton spoke with intense earnestness, and when she finished, tears of passionate regret stood in Winifred's eyes.

"It is too late, Fee! You do not understand. Your words only make me more miserable."

"Why too late?"

"Because I behaved wickedly to him; because he must despise me, and because he will go and marry that French-woman, who loves him and lets him see it."

"Did you refuse him, then?"

"Don't ask me, Fee? I think my pride blinded me. If I could atone for it now, I think I would ask him on my knees to marry me. I can't tell you the true story. I know you love me, and would not willingly pain me. I have sealed my fate with my own folly. Do not ever speak about it again."

And she bit her lips and clinched her hands together, to keep back the rebellious tears.

When she was alone, Mrs. Clayton pondered over it. It seemed very strange and incomprehensible to her. What in the world could they have quarreled about so bitterly? Why should she refuse him in a fit of pride? Why should he hate her because she had refused him?

The days passed away quickly. Visitors came and went at Endon Vale, and the party was now gay, now grand, now mirthful, now sedate. Lord Harold and Lady Ada still remained. He had made up his mind that she was very sweet and charming; and she—well, we already know what she thought of him. The conclusion that every one expected came at last, and all concerned in the matter gave their hearty approval. Ada was to be Lady Harold Erskine, and no one's congratulatory kiss was heartier or more sincere than Winifred's.

"I used to be jealous of you, Winifred," Ada said, returning the kiss, affectionately; "but I have got over that. I know Harold loves me now."

"No one could doubt that who saw you together, dear," laughed her cousin.

It was nearly the end of September, when Mr. Hastings called one afternoon at Endon Vale. As he rode up the avenue, he met Mrs. Clayton sauntering down it.

"Mr. Hastings!" she cried, with real pleasure in her voice; "I have wanted to see you such a long time."

He dismounted and walked along by her side, leading his splendid bay horse.

"There is nobody at home but me—they are all gone to a picnic, and I should have been with them, but for one of my bad headaches."

"It is better now, I trust. You do not look ill."

"No; I am getting quite strong here. Lady Grace is so good to me, and Winifred," she added, looking sidelong at him—"I think I never knew any one so sweet and thoughtful."

She noted the slightest quiver of his lip, but he said nothing—merely bent his head as though in polite acquiescence.

"You must be tired after your long ride," she said. "Come in and have some wine."

"Not any, thank you," he answered, quickly; "the ride is nothing. I have only a few minutes to stay."

"Surely you will remain to dinner. Lady Grace will be quite angry with me if I let you go."

"I can not stay, indeed, thank you. I have several friends at the Court, and I said particularly I should return to dinner. If you will excuse me for a moment, I should like to take the Seigneur round to the stables and have his mouth washed out." A groom came at the sound of the horse's hoofs, and Mr. Hastings turned back and joined Mrs. Clayton.

"Will you not come into the house?" she asked.

"Not unless you are going." And they went together into what was called the lawn-garden.

"Am I to congratulate you?" she said, looking up at him suddenly.

"Congratulate me, Mrs. Clayton?" he repeated after her. "On what?"

"I heard you were going to marry the Princess Zelikoff."

"Then some one has been taking an unwarrantable liberty with the Princess Zelikoff's name."

"Not altogether unwarrantable, Mr. Hastings."

"Surely, yes. I am quite certain that she never gave the slightest foundation for such a report."

"Come, confess now that it looks rather suspicious when a gentleman takes a lady a cruise in his yacht."

"My dear Mrs. Clayton! what do you mean?"

"Did not your cousin and the princess accompany you on your yachting expedition?"

"Most certainly not! No one went with me but Le Marchant and Ashburton."

Mrs. Clayton looked rather blank, but felt secretly pleased.

"Then we have all been misinformed," she said, laughing. "And forgive my pertinacity; but, seriously, you are not engaged to the princess?"

"I am not. I feel greatly vexed that there should have ever been a discussion about the matter."

Mrs. Clayton sat down on a garden bench; she was silent for a moment, and then looking up in her companion's face, said, with some hesitation:

"We are old friends, Errol—are we not?"

"We are, indeed," he returned, smiling, with some surprise.

"May I take an old friend's liberty?" she asked again, with still more hesitation.

"You may do anything that you wish or please," he answered.

"And you promise not to be offended?"

"I promise sacredly."

"Thank you. Then, Errol, I am going to say something exceedingly distasteful to myself, perhaps painful to you, for which some one else would, I think, never forgive me. I am bold—am I not?"

"You are enigmatical," Mr. Hastings replied, still smiling.

"I like you very sincerely; I love her," Mrs. Clayton went on, hastily, "and I want you both to be happy; therefore I am about to perform a Quixotic action, which may be the means of losing me your friendship and her love. I see you frown; perhaps you guess of whom I am speaking?"

"I would rather have a certainty than a surmise," he said, gravely; "tell me, if you please."

"I speak of Winifred Eyre. My task is all the more difficult because I do not, in truth, know, nor can I guess at the circumstance which has caused your estrangement.

Do not be angry with me, Errol. I must ask you one question—do you love her?”

As she spoke she cast a side glance at him, and saw an ominous knitting of the brows, and a stern compression of the proud mouth.

“I did love her, God knows!” he said, presently, seeming to force the words from unwilling lips.

“But now?” Fee asked, eagerly. “Do you love her now?”

Mr. Hastings rose suddenly.

“I can not understand this strange questioning, Mrs. Clayton. It is inexpressibly painful to me.”

“But you shall know, Errol,” she answered, with intense earnestness. “Only sit down and answer me.”

Out of courtesy he forced himself to resume the seat, and speak calmly.

“I scarcely know,” he said. “I am trying to forget her.”

“But, Errol, if you thought she cared for you, would you still try to forget her?”

“I can not answer you,” he said, speaking abruptly, after a pause. “Miss Eyre is not what I thought her. I believed her to be sweet, and gracious, and womanly; and I have found her hard, and proud and cold!”

“O, Errol, you mistake—she is neither.”

“She is to me,” he said, sternly.

Mrs. Clayton waited for some moments.

“If I might only tell you,” she said, in great perplexity. “I could not bear to say anything that seemed like a breach of confidence.”

“Has Miss Eyre confided in you, then?” Errol asked, quickly.

“No, she would not tell me anything actually, and yet—Mr. Hastings, I could not say this to any one else, but I know you will consider it as sacred.”

He bent his head gravely.

“She broke down once when we were speaking of you. She condemned her own false pride bitterly; she said you must hate her; that she—”

And Mrs. Clayton stopped suddenly in her rapid utterance, feeling a terrible fear that she had committed an unwarrantable breach of trust.

A sudden thrill of pleasure came into Errol's heart, but the expression of his face remained unchanged.

"Mrs. Clayton," he said, with some passion, "I asked Miss Eyre twice, nay, three times, to be my wife. I made myself her slave because—well, the reason matters little—suffice it that I humbled my pride into the dust for her sake. She treated me with scorn, and yet I bore it, for I believed in my heart she loved me. When I asked her the last time, her refusal was couched in such terms that I felt the utter impossibility of a thought of love coming between us again. A man may be all the prouder for exercising courtesy and forbearance to a woman, but he should not altogether forget what is due to himself, unless he would have her despise him." He had lashed himself almost into anger with his last words.

"I can not deny the justice of your words," Mrs. Clayton answered, with a touch of sadness. "There is only one thing to be said, and you alone can judge of that. Was her anger with you wholly unjustifiable?"

He was silent.

"I can not answer you, Mrs. Clayton. You and I might think differently, but it is impossible that you should know the truth. Her anger was justifiable; but she would have seemed the more lovable, the more womanly, in my eyes, had she been less unforgiving."

"She has forgiven you now from the depths of her heart. And she suffers, Errol—suffers; and at night, when she is alone, she cries bitter tears. I went one night to her room, and I heard her sobbing as though her heart would break, and went away again."

Mr. Hastings felt a sudden choking in his throat, and turned away. The groom was just bringing his horse round. He rose.

"Thank you a thousand times for your kindness," he said, in a low voice; "I shall not forget it. Good-bye;" and he took her little white hand in his and kissed it. Then he mounted the Seigneur, and rode thoughtfully away.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ORDEAL.

FOR days and days after his conversation with Mrs. Clayton, Mr. Hastings mused upon her words. So many doubts divided his mind, and kept him from deciding on what course he should pursue. "Could he in truth rely upon her words?—did Winifred really love him, and regret her harshness and pride to him, or was it a kindly though mistaken attempt on Mrs. Clayton's part to bring them once more together?" If he sought her again, and she gave him the same answer, his pride would never recover such a terrible humiliation. It would be wiser not to risk it. But then, he loved her so dearly. No sacrifice could seem too great if he won her in the end, and surely he owed ten times more forbearance to her than he could have done to any other woman.

A whole month of restless uneasiness passed away before he could make up his mind to visit Endon Vale again. Then one morning he plucked up courage suddenly and went.

At first Mrs. Clayton had anticipated the happiest results from her talk with Mr. Hastings; but as day after day wore on, and he did not return, she fell into despair, and wished with some bitterness of heart that she had forborne to interfere. One thing was fortunate — she had not breathed a word to Winifred of what had passed between them.

Lady Grace Farquhar's last guests were on the eve of departure, much to her husband's delight. In two days' time Mrs. Clayton would be the only visitor remaining. Mr. Hastings scarcely spoke to Miss Eyre. When he did, he noticed with some secret pleasure that her color came and went, and that she seemed restless and uneasy. Lady Grace was in the garden, giving directions to the head-gardener, when Mr. Hastings joined her. She turned to him with a pleased smile, and gave him her hand.

"I have come to ask a favor of you, Lady Grace," he said.

"I am sure I shall be disposed to grant it," she answered, pleasantly, "unless it is something very hard."

"When your guests are gone, I want you all to come and spend two or three days at the Court."

Lady Grace hesitated.

"I should like it very much," she said, presently; "but Sir Clayton has the greatest dislike to leaving home when he is once settled."

"If I can succeed in persuading him, will you come? I have a particular object in my request."

"Oh, yes, with pleasure; and I am sure Marion and Winifred will be delighted. But I am afraid you will have some difficulty with my husband."

Mr. Hastings was, however, more successful than Lady Grace anticipated, and won the baronet's consent without much trouble. The truth was, there was a very fine library at the Court, and Sir Clayton had for some time past been anxious to consult some old and valuable works he knew to be there.

"I have succeeded," exclaimed Errol, with a smiling face, as he rejoined Lady Grace. "And now please tell me what day will be most convenient for you to come over?"

"Oh, any time you like to name. We have no engagements."

"May I say next Tuesday, then?"

"If you please."

"And you will stay until Thursday, and as much longer as I succeed in making your visit agreeable?"

When everything was settled, Winifred heard of the arrangements with conflicting feelings. She was almost sorry that she had been included in the invitation; her presence could but waken unpleasant memories in Mr. Hastings' mind.

"Won't you, and Sir Clayton, and Fee go," she pleaded to Lady Grace, "and let me stay at home with Madame de Montolieu?"

"No, dear, I can not do that. I have accepted for you, and Mr. Hastings might consider your absence a slight."

And Winifred, not being wholly unwilling to go, said no more.

Tuesday came; the morning was lovely, and it was arranged that Mrs. Clayton and Winifred should ride, and that Sir Clayton should drive Lady Grace over in his phaeton. When they arrived at the Court. Mr. Hastings

and his friends were standing on the steps to receive them. This time he did not lift Winifred from her horse and whisper welcome, but went at once to Mrs. Clayton. Winifred felt the difference, a little bitterly, perhaps, and yet with a quick consciousness that she had no right to feel it. But when she was shown to her room, a glad thought blotted out the bitterness. Was it by accident that the walls were hung with her favorite prints, and that vases filled with scarlet geraniums and ferns—her favorite combination—were disposed all about the room? Scarcely. It must have been a wish to please her, and if he still cared about giving her pleasure, surely all the love had not died out.

There was a dinner-party in the evening—a very gay, pleasant party, that every one enjoyed. Afterward Winifred sung, and was brighter and happier than she had been for many weeks. Mr. Hastings had scarcely spoken to her, but yet she was conscious of a feeling that he was not indifferent to her.

The next day he asked her suddenly if she would like to see her old home once more.

"Yes," she said, quietly; "will you take me?"

"If you will go alone with me I will," he answered.

"I will go, if Lady Grace does not object."

"Shall I ask her?"

"Do."

And they went toward Lady Grace, who was sitting reading by the open window.

"Will you trust Miss Eyre to my charge for half an hour?" Mr. Hastings asked, lightly.

"Why, where are you going?" she said, looking up.

"We thought of walking over to the Farm."

"I see no objection," responded Lady Grace, smiling, "except that you always used to be so terribly quarrelsome. I think I must exact a promise first that there shall be no disagreement on the way."

"I promise," laughed Errol.

"And I," added Winifred, a shade more seriously.

"Then I consent," smiled Lady Grace.

They went silently away together, neither speaking until they reached the end of the broad gravel drive. Then Mr. Hastings broke the silence.

"Shall we go through the woods?"

"I should like to very much," she answered. "I have not been there since—" And then she stopped suddenly, remembering upon what occasion she had been there last.

"Since when?" and he looked keenly at her.

"Oh, a long time ago—more than two years."

"Do you remember that bank?" Errol asked, suddenly. "It was there I first saw you."

"No," she corrected, smiling; "you saw me before then."

"Ah, yes, I had forgotten. We met first in the town, when I was with your cousin."

"She did not call me cousin then," said Winifred, with a smile in which there was no vexation or scorn.

Presently they came to a gate; the same gate they had stood at more than two years ago—the same at which they had parted, she suffering and filled with shame, he stung by remorse. He had brought her here on purpose to test the strength of her love and forgiveness. He did not open it for her to pass through, but stopped and leaned against it. She stood in front of him, waiting patiently, and he looked intently at her.

"It is two years and two months since we were here together last, Miss Eyre. You are greatly changed since then."

"For the worse?" she asked, quickly.

"Not as the world would think."

"But as you think?"

"I scarcely know. They say we are all the happier, when we lose our impulsiveness and warmth of heart, and become cold and indifferent. You have found it so, no doubt?"

His tone was almost harsh, and she looked up in his face sadly, and yet with infinite patience.

"I can not be angry at your saying so, Mr. Hastings. You have the right to think it."

"And yet I would rather hear you deny it indignantly, Miss Eyre."

"If I denied it, would you believe me?"

He was silent for a moment, while there was a struggle going on in his heart. He had too much chivalry of feeling to wish her to confess herself wrong and plead to him, and yet there was a latent pride of spirit that made him feel it

would be unmanly, undignified, for him to make the first advance now, after all that had gone before.

She was summoning up her courage to say something to him that was a most terrible ordeal to her maiden modesty. Her lips were half open to speak; a crimson blush suffused her cheeks, and again she hesitated.

He watched her, unwilling to help her, yet feeling vividly that she was suffering.

"If," she faltered at last—"if I thought that in spite of all that is past, you did not hate me—" and she stopped.

"You know what I feel for you," he said, quietly; "am I likely to change?"

"Then I should like to tell you how much I regret the past," she went on, in a low voice. "You do not know how bitterly I have suffered in the past months, because my pride would not let me own I—loved you. I am ready to make my atonement, here in this very place, the bare remembrance of which has made me shrink and turn from you before. I forgive you the wrong you did me, and I ask you to pardon me too. Have I humiliated myself enough?" and she looked for a moment in his face, and then turned sharply away, with a quivering lip and large tears in her eyes.

He caught her by the hand.

"Winifred!" he said, a sudden passion in his voice and eyes, "tell me one thing more. Do you in truth love me?"

She looked bravely up in his face.

"I have never left off loving you!"

He drew her toward him in a strong clasp, until her head rested on his breast.

"I think it is true," he whispered, "that we love that best which is most dearly won."

It was almost dark when they returned to the Court.

"Your idea of the length of half an hour must be singularly vague, Mr. Hastings," smiled Lady Grace. "Surely you have been further than the Farm?"

"Not even as far, Lady Grace," he replied, with a glad smile; and then Winifred being gone, he told her his story.

"I am very glad," she said kindly. "I could wish you nothing better than to have such a wife as Winifred."

All obstacles surmounted, and the engagement between

them being ratified by the consent of all parties, Mr. Hastings would not hear of any objection to the marriage taking place immediately.

"Remember, darling," he said, when Winifred would have urged him to wait, "I have loved you—I have wanted you for my wife for more than two years. Having made me so miserable, surely you owe it to me to lose no time in atoning for it. Pray get that horrible trousseau business over with all speed, and make no needless delays, or I shall think you do not love me as I love you."

Sir Howard was delighted when he was apprised of the intended marriage, and insisted that Winifred should be married from Hurst Manor—an arrangement that she did not altogether object to. She had a fancy for being married in the little church where she had so often sat when she was only a farmer's daughter, and no one noticed her. I think Mr. Hastings would rather have gone quietly and simply to the church, and taken her there undowered for his wife, than amid such pomp and parade as seemed good to her grandfather. She was not the simple little country girl now, to whom he would have given the first glimpse of a grand, splendid life, but an elegant young lady, accustomed to luxury and good society. Errol would have liked much better that she should come to him portionless; but neither was that to be as desired.

Sir Howard Champion gave her twenty thousand pounds, and Sir Clayton ten thousand, whilst Lady Grace provided her with a magnificent trousseau. Mr. Hastings had the family diamonds reset and remounted for her, and would have had her wear some of them at least at the wedding.

"Please not, Errol," she pleaded. "I do not like all this grandeur. I would rather not forget that my early life was simple."

Mrs. Clayton was of course to have been at the wedding. She was looking forward to it, glad at heart at the part she had taken in bringing together two people who cared for each other. Three weeks before the day fixed she received a letter with a foreign postmark.

"Who can it be from?" she said, turning it over in her hand, and speaking to Winifred. "I do not know the hand; it seems crabbed and foreign, and has been forwarded from London. It is addressed to Milady Clayton, too!"

And Fee continued to look at it without, however, breaking the seal. "Whom can it be from?" she said again.

"If you open it you will soon see, dear," Winifred replied, laughing.

"I don't quite like to do it," Mrs. Clayton remarked presently. "I suppose it is because I am nervous and unwell; but I always feel as if every letter I received contained bad news. Will you open it for me?"

And she tossed it across the table.

"Of course I will. What a scrawl!" And Miss Eyre proceeded to tear the envelope. "I should imagine it contained some mysterious secret, from the way it is gummed together. I must take a knife and slit it open from the side."

With some trouble she got at the contents—a dirty scrap of foreign paper, with a few crabbed hieroglyphics, and began to read aloud:

"Milady an honord exelency—I ave te profonde regrette to annonce to you dat te Milor Clayton—M. yor hosband av bin took wid de horrible maladie of cholera, an want to see you. I av sent for the principal docteur, an am at your odres.
GODEFROI LUPIN."

A horror seized Mrs. Clayton. She had never loved her husband; lately she had hated him; but the idea of his being ill alone among strangers brought the tears to her eyes.

"Oh, Winifred," she exclaimed to her friend, in whose face she read consternation, "I must go to him at once."

"You can not, Fee; weak as you are, it would be madness. The address is some obscure village in Switzerland. Let us go and ask Sir Clayton what had best be done."

"Whom do you suppose this letter to be written by?" Sir Clayton asked, when he had read the curious missive.

"I can not tell. Perhaps the hotel-keeper."

"Had he a foreign valet, do you know, Marion?"

"Not when he left London. Simmons was with him then; but he may have left; he was always threatening to leave, and then of course it is most probable that Francis would engage a foreigner."

"Something must be done at once. You can not go yourself, Marion—that is quite out of the question—neither can I very well. Perhaps Alfred Clayton is in town; he

was coming up, I know. I will telegraph to him. Stay, I am not sure where he would be. I will go up to London myself at once."

And Sir Clayton rang the bell, and ordered the carriage.

"But I feel that I ought to go myself, Sir Clayton; the letter said he wished to see me."

"My dear, do not think of it; the journey would kill you. To cross the Channel in this cold weather, and with these tempestuous winds, would be nothing short of madness."

Sir Clayton dressed hurriedly for his journey, jumped into the carriage, and drove off to the station, leaving Winifred to explain matters to his wife. He just caught the up-train by a minute; the horses had accomplished the five miles in exactly twenty-two minutes. Sir Clayton had told the coachman that it was a matter of life and death, and the old man, sorely against his will, had driven his favorites the whole distance at the top of their speed. But he walked them home every inch of the way. Meantime Sir Clayton reached London, and drove off to the hotel where he knew Alfred Clayton always stayed when he was in town. By good fortune he had just arrived there, and was at the door, ready to depart again, when Sir Clayton drove up. The story was briefly told, and the two men looked doubtfully at each other.

"Of course I will go at once," Mr. Clayton said; "but cholera in one of those foreign holes is a nasty business. I will get a time-table, and see how soon I can be off. I must get you to telegraph down to Mrs. Grant, at Brighton—I promised to dine and sleep at her house to-night."

"I think," said Sir Clayton, "that while you are making preparations, I will drive round to the house in Piccadilly, and see if there is any further news."

On arriving there he found another letter, with a foreign postmark, and opened it at once. It was written by the doctor in good French, and informed Mrs. Clayton delicately that her husband had just breathed his last.

"This is a sad business," said Sir Clayton, returning to the hotel; "you must lose no time in getting there. I fear he will be buried long before you reach the place, and there will be no chance of bringing the body to England. Of course if—"

"Of course—of course!" exclaimed Alfred Clayton,

hastily, and grasping the baronet's hand he hurried off. He was the next heir to all that splendid entailed property, but for the time he felt no exultation at the thought of stepping into the shoes of the man who lay dead and alone in a foreign country. On reaching the village, he found that Sir Clayton's surmise was correct, and that the rich man had been interred some days before with little ceremony. The obsequious landlord, and Lupin, the valet of the dead man, were voluble in their information. From Lupin he learned that Mr. Clayton had engaged him in Paris six weeks previously, having parted in a quarrel with his English servant. There had been a very handsome English lady with Milor Clayton, whom he, Lupin, had for some time believed to be his wife. Just before his master was taken ill, he and the lady had a violent quarrel, and she left him to return to Paris. He was about to leave for England when he was attacked by cholera, and had bidden him write at once for his wife. These particulars Alfred Clayton forwarded in due course to the baronet.

At first Mrs. Clayton was shocked and stunned at the unexpectedness of the blow. She had disliked her husband, we know, but it seemed so horrible for him to have died in that terrible way, so far from home, and without a single friend. Her first resolution was to leave Endon Vale, and she sent an urgent message to her aunt to join her. This time Lady Marion made no delay in answering the summons. Lady Grace begged Fee to remain.

"You are very kind," she answered. "I can scarcely thank you enough for your long hospitality; but I would rather go now. Under the circumstances, I could but mar the cheerfulness that ought to reign here during the preparations for such a happy event as dear Winifred's marriage; and until I can realize my new position, I would rather go away quietly to some fresh place. If you invite me later, I shall be very glad to come to you again."

Mrs. Clayton was still a rich woman, although she did not, of course, possess more than a tithe of her husband's income. Still, that was enough to give her every luxury that she had been accustomed to, and to keep her in a manner befitting her station. She could not pretend any deep sorrow for the loss of a man who had been cruel, neglectful, unfaithful, and almost brutal to her; but the time she had been absent from him had in a measure softened

the harshness of the previous memories, and the sad fate which had overtaken him forbade in her forgiving heart the angry remembrance of past wrongs.

"Perhaps, aunt," she said, in a low, regretful voice, "if I had been more forbearing, and less provoking to him, he might have been different in time."

Lady Marion looked up from her book.

"It is always right, dear, to think kindly of people who are gone, and I should feel it wrong to speak against Francis Clayton now; but I can not help thinking that no amount of goodness or gentleness could have touched a heart so bitter and cynical as his."

CHAPTER XV.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER.

MRS. MAXWELL declined absolutely to be present at Winifred's wedding. As she was utterly indifferent now to the favor or disfavor of her relations, she did not trouble to make any excuse, but contented herself with saying she did not feel inclined to be one of the party.

"I always disliked the girl, and thought her *intrigante*," she wrote to her mother. "It would be a perfect farce for me to be present at her marriage. I have not the least sympathy with her success, although I admit she has played her cards well."

Mrs. Champion did not show the letter to her father-in-law, but invented some plausible excuse for her daughter's refusal of the invitation.

"Nonsense, Margaret!" Sir Howard exclaimed, sharply; "you are deceiving me. It is her jealous temper that keeps her away; but I shall write and insist on her coming."

"Pray do not, Sir Howard!" entreated Mrs. Champion; "it will do no good, and perhaps make a quarrel between all parties. Take no notice, and let her do as she likes."

"Nothing of the sort," retorted the baronet. "I will not have any slights put upon Winifred now; she has had your airs and Flora's quite long enough. If Flora had only been possessed of a little tact, she might be standing

in her cousin's shoes now, instead of having tied herself to a maudlin old—”

“Oh, pray—pray, Sir Howard!” exclaimed Mrs. Charnpion, deprecatingly.

“Well, I shall write, at all events,” Sir Howard said, angrily. “I don’t choose her damned jealous airs to give rise to unpleasant remarks; she *must* come.”

And by the next post he dispatched a letter to his granddaughter of a nature scarcely temperate enough to calm her already ruffled pride. An answer came by return of post that made the old gentleman perfectly furious.

“Dear Sir Howard,” Mrs. Maxwell wrote, “it is quite natural that, having been so long under your control, and subject to your commands, you should feel some difficulty in believing I could presume to act in disobedience to your orders. I, however, have a very grateful and appreciative recollection that I am now entirely my own mistress, and subject to the caprice and desires of no one. Under these circumstances, you will, I feel convinced, understand finally that I utterly refuse to be present at the marriage of the girl Winifred Eyre, whose very existence is a blot on the genealogical page of our family.”

No one but a bad-hearted woman could have written such a letter to one whom she was bound to venerate, not only from the tie of blood and age, but from the thousand kindnesses he had heaped upon her (in spite of occasional irritability) from her childhood. But Flora Maxwell had in the last few months grown very hard and bitter of heart. She would never know a genuine love or friendship again; for the future, wealth, dress and admiration would be the only gods she sought.

The wedding was none the less happy or magnificent for Mrs. Maxwell’s absence; every one pronounced it a very splendid affair; and this time the sympathies of all were enlisted, for the bride and bridegroom were both young, and handsome, and happy. Sir Howard gave Winifred away, and her husband received her with infinite gladness and tenderness. All the farmers and villagers came round to see Miss Eyre, “that they had known from a child,” married.


“Lor!” they said one to the other, “don’t she look as proud and handsome as the best of them?”

At Hazell Court there were great festivities; dinners for

all the tenants, and games and fire-works in the evening, and a real military band from London.

Captain le Marchant was best man, of course; Ada For-dyce chief bride-maid, and Lord Harold Erskine was able to be present without suffering any pangs of jealousy. He was to be married himself in a month's time. Mme. de Montolieu had actually been persuaded to be present at the wedding.

"When we come back you will always live with us, dear madame," Winifred had said.

"Not yet, my love," the old lady answered. "Young people are best by themselves at first. I shall ask Lady Grace to keep me a little longer; and then, if in six months' or a year's time you care to have me, I shall rejoice to come to you." 

* * * * *

The spring had come round again, and Mr. and Mrs. Hastings were at Hazell Court. Mrs. Clayton was staying with them. She was herself again now—not so bright and sparkling, perhaps, as in the old days, but very sweet and good.

She and Winifred were sitting together in the green morning-room as the twilight was coming on.

"I think the old Court is decidedly improved by the presence of a mistress," said Mrs. Clayton, presently. "I always thought it charming—now it is perfect."

Winifred laughed a short, happy laugh.

"Oh, do you really think so? It seems to me the place ought to have such a much grander mistress than I. Fancy a girl brought up to a simple country life coming to such state and grandeur! I feel as if I ought to be like Lady Burleigh, and instead of making myself so thoroughly at home, to pine away and die."

"It is a good thing Errol is not here to hear you, or he would be very angry at your saying such foolish things. If ever any one was born with a thorough appreciation of the pomps and vanities of the world, it is you, I think. It makes me laugh when I remember how you used to preach to me about love in a cottage, and marrying the man you loved, if he had not a shilling."

"And so I would have married Errol if he had been as poor as—"

"Be thankful, *ma belle*, that your love was not put to such a terrible test."

There was silence for a few moments, and then Mrs. Clayton spoke again, with a voice that betrayed some agitation.

"Winifred, did you ever know how much I cared for Colonel d'Aguilar?"

"I knew he cared a great deal for you, Fee."

"And you thought because I could not make up my mind to share poverty with him, that I did not love him?"

"Nay, Fee, I would not say that."

"Well, then," cried Mrs. Clayton, impetuously, "I tell you I loved him both before and after I married Francis Clayton—better, after, perhaps, than before. I may as well confess the whole; I am not afraid of your repeating it. When I was so miserable, we met again in London, and it seemed my only comfort to get his sympathy for my trouble; of course it was imprudent, wrong even, and I shudder when I think how it might have ended. At last we parted, I can not tell you how or why, but we parted, with the intention of not meeting again. I have never seen or heard of him since. I can guess why he keeps away."

"You think he does not like to seek you because you are rich as well as free?" Winifred suggested.

Mrs. Clayton bent her head.

"And I want you to do something for me," she said, after a pause.

"To ask him here, darling?" said Winifred, gently.

"Yes," answered Fee, simply.

"Errol shall write to him at once. I know he likes him. I suppose he is in England."

"I should think so," and Mrs. Clayton rose slowly and left the room.

Presently Mr. Hastings came in.

"Errol!" said his wife.

"Yes, my pet."

"I want you to write at once and invite Colonel d'Aguilar to come and stay."

"Do you, dear—why?"

"Never mind. You are not to ask any questions. I can not tell you the reasons—at all events, not now."

He went up and kissed her.

"You seem to have an equal opinion of your husband's powers of divination and discretion," he said, laughing.

"Well, Errol, but will you?" pleaded Winifred.

"Of course, I will do anything you like," he answered.

"It is too late to write to-night."

"Not if you send the letter over to Holton, Errol."

"What! is it so important as all that?"

"Yes, darling," she answered, coaxingly, pushing him into a chair, and bringing the writing materials to him."

"Very well, little tyrant. But where is he?—what is his address?"

"Oh, Errol, I can't tell you," cried Winifred, looking blank. "Do you not know?"

"I don't, indeed. I believe his regiment has left Hounslow."

"Well, can not you send to his club?"

"Yes, I can do that; but you seemed in such a terrible hurry, and if he is not in town, the chances are he may not get it for days. Perhaps Fee knows."

"Now, Errol, how should she?"

"I don't know, darling. I always thought they were such great friends."

"Why, they have not met for months and months."

"Perhaps they might not like to meet, then," said Mr. Hastings, looking up at Winifred, and smiling a little maliciously.

"Had you not better consult Fee first?" and then Winifred fairly laughed, but would not be induced to say anything more on the subject. However, the letter was duly written and sent, and in three days' time the answer arrived. Colonel d'Aguilar would have much pleasure in spending a few days at the Court, and Mr. Hastings might expect him the following day.

When he came there was an embarrassment in his manner toward Mrs. Clayton; he was grave, kind, and courteous, as though there had been no more than an ordinary friendship between them. He was resolved not to speak a single word of love to her. He felt her wealth to be a barrier between them, and could not bear to say what was in his heart to her, for fear any doubt of his great love should come between them—for fear any base thought should creep in and see a sordid desire in the renewal of his passion for her.

The largest, the most generous minds have sometimes the greatest fear of being misunderstood. The last few months had been very painful to him. When he heard of Francis Clayton's sudden death, a feeling that he was ashamed of came over him. He was not glad, not actually glad—nay, he felt a kind of pity for the man who had been cut off in the prime of his life, selfish and ill-spent though it had been; but he could not forget that Fee was free. He felt that she must be the first to hold communication with him. Would she do so? did she still care for him? and had she believed truly in the unselfishness of his renunciation of her?

Mrs. Hastings was by no means satisfied with the progress of affairs. Instead of the first natural reserve between Colonel d'Aguilar and her friend being dissipated, it seemed to grow stronger each day. They avoided, above all things, being left alone together. Winifred wanted to help them; she felt certain they cared for each other, and, besides, women in the first flush of a happy marriage are always inveterate match-makers.

"Errol," said his wife, one day at lunch, "I want to drive you over to the Manor this afternoon. I am going to see grandpapa; and he has grown so fond of you, he never likes me to go without you."

"You forget, dear," replied Mr. Hastings—"we can not be so uncourteous as to leave our guests."

"How stupid and provoking men are!" Winifred thought, pettishly. She looked up at Colonel d'Aguilar pleadingly.

"You will excuse him, will you not?"

"I was intending to ask permission to ride over and call on Lord Lancing this afternoon," he answered, fabricating a polite fiction for the occasion.

"And I have a headache, and do not care to go out," said Mrs. Clayton.

"Then we will go over to the Manor, as you wish, Winifred. Have you ordered the ponies?"

"No, please ring the bell, and say three o'clock."

"I am just going round to the stables. Will you come, D'Aguilar? What will you ride this afternoon?" and the two gentlemen went off together.

"Fee," said Winifred, suddenly, "you and Colonel d'Aguilar are very provoking."

"How, Winifred?"

"You are so strange and distant to each other; every day seems to make you worse. Why do you not let him see you care for him?"

"I do not think he cares for me any longer," Mrs. Clayton answered, despondingly.

"How can you be so blind, Fee? You must know what he feels. Is it not quite natural that he should hesitate to remind you of the past now that you are rich?"

"But, Winifred, a woman can not speak first."

"Of course you can not ask him to marry you, but you can let him see that you are not utterly indifferent to him."

Mrs. Clayton made no answer.

"It is so tiresome of him to go out," continued Winifred, presently.

"And defeat your kind intentions, little match-maker," added Fee, looking up.

When Errol and his wife had started, Mrs. Clayton took her book to the green-room, and began to read. Colonel d'Aguilar came in to fetch a letter he had written in the morning. A sudden thought crossed into Fee's mind that sent the blood rushing over neck and brow, and made her heart beat in great throbs.

"Colonel d'Aguilar," she said, with a voice almost inarticulate with nervousness.

"Yes, Mrs. Clayton."

"Are you really going out?"

"I am just starting for Holton."

"Won't you stay with me? I shall be so dull all alone."

He hesitated for a moment.

"If you really wish it, I will."

"Of course I wish it, or I should not ask," Fee responded, a little petulantly.

"Then I will go and send the groom back to the stables." And he left the room.

Mrs. Clayton was excessively uneasy in her mind. She could not form the least resolve what she should say to him when he returned.

"You will not thank me for spoiling your ride," were her first words to him.

"I would much rather be here. I only proposed riding to Holton because I thought Mrs. Hastings was anxious for her husband's company."

"Are they not devoted?" sighed Fee. "I never saw a man fonder of a woman. I do believe he fancies there is no one like her—so graceful, so amiable, so clever."

"That is as it should be, is it not?" asked Colonel d'Aguilar, smiling.

"Of course. He intends her to make quite an impression this season. He has taken a mansion for three months, and an opera-box, and I know he means her to have the handsomest carriage and horses in London. Fancy a woman having all that, and a handsome husband, whom she loves, besides!" And there were tears in Mrs. Clayton's eyes.

"She is very sweet-mannered. I think she deserves her happiness."

"I am sure she does," responded Mrs. Clayton, warmly. "She would have married him just the same if he had been poor. She was not like me, Colonel d'Aguilar."

"You forget how differently you were brought up," he exclaimed, eager to defend her from any imputation, even though it came from her own lips. "Poverty would have been a terrible hardship to you, who have been used all your life to luxury."

"It is very generous in you to excuse my selfishness," Fee said, softly, "since you suffered by it. Did you suffer?" she asked, with a quick alternation of mood. "Hardly," she added, with the slightest tinge of bitterness, "or you would not have been so ready to give me up."

It was Colonel d'Aguilar's turn to feel bitter and hurt now.

"I believe women never give men credit for real unselfishness," he said. "A woman has more faith in the passion that sacrifices than in the love that spares her."

"Colonel d'Aguilar," said Mrs. Clayton, with bright tears standing in her eyes, "I would give the world to know if you left me because you really loved me."

"My love could have little worth for you," he answered, sadly, "if a doubt of my motive could have found room in your heart."

There came then a long silence between them, and both looked straight away from each other, as though they feared the next words that might be spoken. At last Mrs. Clayton turned her face toward the man whom she loved

and esteemed more now than she had ever done in her life before.

"Ivors," she said, in a low voice, that trembled from the deep undercurrent of emotion—"Ivors, do you not know how hard it is for a woman to ask for a man's love?"

He turned quickly toward her.

"My darling! do you think it necessary to ask for what I have given you, wholly and entirely, from the time I first saw you? Do I need to tell you that I love you with heart and soul, and that I can never cease to care for the little fairy who first bewitched me until the day I die?"

THE END.

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